

# DJT'S ENNEAGRAM TYPE



The Case for Three

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## INTRODUCTION

“When someone suggested I write a timely blog on Donald Trump, my first thought was that his Enneagram type was so obvious that there was no reason to write one.”—Ginger Lapid Bogda, a leading Enneagram teacher

President DJT is the most overexposed and overanalyzed person in the world. Yet here I am asking you to read my thoughts on his personality type. Why?

### WHY I CALL THE PRESIDENT “DJT”

Constitutional democracy is beautiful. It is also fragile. The current President not only disregards long-held norms. He flaunts this disregard. This coupled with his demagoguery has many of us feeling uneasy about the future. Will our democracy survive four or eight (or more) years of his Presidency? Or will the country turn into an autocracy or some other form of authoritarian rule?

As citizens, we have more power than we think to prevent this. One tool at our disposal is language. I call the President “DJT” in all but others’ quotes because I refuse to accept his moral legitimacy. Although legally he is the President, morally I place him in a different sphere. Using his initials is one way to do this. Second, tyranny is less likely when people refuse to conform. Consider the advice of Yale historian Timothy Snyder, author of *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*: “Stand out. Someone has to. It is easy, in words and deeds, to follow along. It can feel strange to do or say something different. But without that unease, there is no freedom. And the moment you set an example, the spell of the status quo is broken, and others will follow.” Finally, I’m just plain tired of saying the President’s name and feeling what that word evokes in my mind and body.

I write first for people who see DJT as a threat to democracy and the planet and would like him to resign or be removed. What actions we take depend on how we assess the man and what makes him tick. The Enneagram system of personality types offers a useful window into his motivations if—and only if—we make a rigorously grounded assessment.

Second, DJT's lack of maturity presents an opportunity for people in the Enneagram community to ask a novel question: how does a person's stage of development—as defined by experts in constructivist adult development—shift how we understand their Enneagram type?

Third, I missed the debate about Obama's Enneagram type. By the time I joined the fray, everyone was exhausted by the topic. With DJT, the debate is still fresh.

Let's start there.

For most of the 2016 campaign, I agreed with Ginger Lapid-Bogda that DJT is obviously an Eight. He's vindictive, confrontational, and impulsive. What else could he be? Now I see him as a Three. What changed?

In the fall I had coffee with a friend. Her expertise is constructivist adult development, which describes the interior stages of growth we pass through as adults. Each stage is more complex than its predecessor. Each brings new capacities and new challenges. When I said to my friend, "I think DJT's an Eight," she replied, "Perhaps, but he's definitely an Opportunist." She was referring not to personality type, which persists for life, but stage of development, which shifts as we mature. The Opportunist is impulsive, aggressive, and ready to blame others. Most of us pass through this stage in childhood on our way to more mature ways of living. In studies of managers and executives, Opportunists are rare. This is because they haven't yet learned to conform to group norms. They are pre-conformist or "pre-conventional."

When comedians joke that DJT is a "man-child," they are onto something. Development theory explains why. Physically and chronologically, he is 71 years old. Developmentally, he is 10. This makes sense viscerally—hence the laughter—but seems to defy logic. How could someone with the maturity of a 10-year-old become a billionaire celebrity and then President? It makes no sense.

Adult development experts have a concept that explains this: "center of gravity." At any point in life, each person is centered at a particular stage of development—where they hang out most of the time—yet has access to other stages before and after it. Most of the time, DJT looks and acts like an Opportunist. But sometimes, he employs capacities of later stages of development. Just enough to get by in the conventional world. Also, being a white man born into wealth didn't hurt.

This, I realized after talking with my friend, changes the Enneagram calculus. If DJT's development stage explains his most prominent Eight-like behaviors, then these behaviors become less indicative of his Type. If he's operating at the Opportunist stage of development,

then he could be doing so *as any of the nine Enneagram Types*. He could be an Eight at the Opportunist stage. But he could just as easily be a Three at that stage. Or a Six. Or a Four.

This was confusing for me, so I turned to the Web for clarity. Alas, it offered little of value. Few people, if any, have explored the relationship between the Enneagram and constructivist adult development. When I led a session on this topic last summer at a conference on adult development, it felt like a genuine green field. The field, I learned, is still green.

So I decided to widen my lens. To hone in on DJT's Type, I started to wonder: What was DJT like during the half century of adult life *before* he ran for President?

Fortunately, there is a wealth of data. Two biographies, two roundtable discussions with his biographers, a book covering "30 years of Doonsbury on Trump," and a series of long profiles filled out the picture.

During the 1980s and 90s, DJT was known for grandiose self-promotion, ostentatious displays of wealth, and intense craving for attention. Tony Schwartz, ghostwriter of *The Art of the Deal*, spent hundreds of hours with DJT. His conclusion: DJT was "obsessed with publicity, and he didn't care what you wrote." Biographer Michael D'Antonio describes DJT's public image as "the overarching project of his lifetime." DJT's second wife, Marla Maples, said after marrying him that she would nurture "the little kid that still wants attention."

The DJT of the 1980s and 90s looked a lot like a Three.

With this in mind, I decided to take a fresh look at his current behaviors. What if his combativeness and tough-guy persona is not his essence or even Eight personality, but instead a self-image he constructed at an early age? What if his mendacity and pugnacity are two sides of the same coin—both expressions of a fragile shell of a man desperate to avoid the humiliation of being revealed as phony? What is DJT like during the 99 percent of his life when he is not on TV or Twitter? And what if I could see this man rather than just the one who gets under my postmodern skin?

The story gets richer.

Consider how DJT spends his days. He watches hours of TV news *about himself* and tunes in for Sean Spicer's entire press briefings. This is instead of meeting with advisors, getting briefed by national security officials, or twisting Senators' arms. A revealing choice! Then look at how people describe private conversations with him. At his first post-election meeting with *The New*

*York Times*, after saying positive words about his declared enemy, he complained about the paper's coverage of him—with the tone not of a dictator threatening retribution but a child whose parents had missed the big game. In January, shortly after criticizing drug companies, he walked into a room with a group of pharmaceutical company CEOs and acted completely differently. “He said one thing for the cameras, and the door shuts, and then it's like kumbaya.”

An Eight might act like this, but it's not likely. Whether you look at his life before politics or his un-televised moments today, one thing becomes clear: DJT is either an Eight with off-the-charts obsession with appearances or a Three whose developmental stage makes him impulsive and vengeful.

How do you decide where to place your bet?

I've explored this question in recent weeks and landed on Three.

My grounding of this assessment involves four steps

1. Responding adequately to arguments that he is an Eight
2. Responding adequately to “not Three” arguments
3. Providing evidence that he is likely not an Eight
4. Providing evidence that he likely is a Three.

The rest of this piece is organized around these four steps. At the end, I suggest implications.

## THE CASE FOR TYPE EIGHT

Bea Chestnut, author of the *The Complete Enneagram* and *The 9 Types of Leadership*, recently made a [strong case](#) that DJT is an Eight. I admire Chestnut's work (and think she's a gem of a person) so I spent time reflecting on her argument. She puts into words what many in the Enneagram community intuit: DJT is combative, vengeful, fast-acting, and lusting for power—all qualities of an Eight. She also offers evidence against Three: DJT's inability to shape shift and

### THE NINE ENNEAGRAM TYPES

Each Enneagram school uses different titles and descriptions for the nine types. I provide titles from Enneagram Worldwide because none of them is identical to a developmental stage mentioned here. The descriptions are from the Enneagram Institute because this is my "home base" for the Enneagram.

1. **The Perfectionist.** The rational, idealistic type: principled, purposeful, self-controlled, and perfectionistic
2. **The Giver.** The caring, interpersonal type: demonstrative, generous, people-pleasing, and possessive.
3. **The Performer.** The Success-Oriented, Pragmatic Type: Adaptive, Excelling, Driven, and Image-Conscious
4. **The Romantic.** The Sensitive, Withdrawn Type: Expressive, Dramatic, Self-Absorbed, and Temperamental
5. **The Observer.** The Intense, Cerebral Type: Perceptive, Innovative, Secretive, and Isolated
6. **The Loyal Skeptic.** The Committed, Security-Oriented Type: Engaging, Responsible, Anxious, and Suspicious
7. **The Epicure.** The Busy, Fun-Loving Type: Spontaneous, Versatile, Distractible, and Scattered
8. **The Protector.** The Powerful, Dominating Type: Self-Confident, Decisive, Willful, and Confrontational
9. **The Mediator.** The Easygoing, Self-Effacing Type: Receptive, Reassuring, Agreeable, and Complacent

apparent comfort with offending half of the United States.

Let's begin with Chestnut's argument for Eight. She points out that DJT possesses these qualities: "combative, aggressive, and vengeful; authoritarian and autocratic; the need for power; denial (believes his truth equals the objective truth); action-oriented, big-picture thinker; impulsive, excessive, and unclear on his impact; inability to express vulnerability; need for attention...through being provocative and rebellious."

All of these qualities describe an Eight. And Chestnut offers pertinent examples from his behavior. It's a convincing case that DJT could be an Eight. That degree of impulsiveness and vindictiveness doesn't grow on every Enneagram tree. It's very Eight-like.

Yet is it *only* Eight-like? Not if you take into account another powerful window into DJT's being: his developmental stage.

## **ENNEAGRAM AND DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES**

The Enneagram, like Myers-Briggs, is a description of horizontal types. We use the word "horizontal" to convey a sense of continuity. You keep your Type for life. How you express it changes based upon your degree of identification with it, but *what* you identify with stays pretty constant. Once a Six, always a Six.

Ego development, unlike the Enneagram, is not a horizontal typology. Instead, it describes the vertical stages that you can progress through as you grow and mature. Each later stage is more complex than the prior stage; it introduces new capacities and new challenges. Just as atoms develop into molecules, which develop into cells, etc., human beings progress through stages that transcend and include each other. Depending on which developmental model you use, there are between eight and ten stages of ego development. For sake of simplicity, let's use the seven stages outlined by Bill Torbert and David Rooke in their classic *Harvard Business Review* article, *Seven Transformations of Leadership*.

How does the Enneagram relate to developmental stage? It's a complex question, one that researchers are just beginning to explore. According to philosopher Ken Wilber, each person can be described as having an Enneagram type and operating at a particular stage of development. Thus, I could be a Type Six acting at the Achiever stage of development—or any of the six other stages. Ditto if I were a Type Two. Therefore, there are 63 total combinations: nine types at each of seven stages.

## SEVEN STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

These stages of development, which Torbert and Rooke call “action logics,” represent increasingly complex ways that leaders make sense of their experience. As you progress to later action logics, you have the capacity to lead effectively in more complex environments. You may or may not have the skills to do so, but you have the maturity.

**Opportunist.** Wins any way possible. Self-oriented; manipulative; “might makes right.” 5% of leaders

**Diplomat.** Avoids overt conflict. Wants to belong; obeys group norms; rarely rocks the boat. 12% of leaders.

**Expert.** Rules by logic and expertise. Seeks rational efficiency. 38% of leaders.

**Achiever.** Meets strategic goals. Effectively achieves goals through teams; juggles managerial duties and market demands. 30% of leaders.

**Individualist.** Interweaves competing personal and company action logics. Creates unique structures to resolve gaps between strategy and performance. 10% of leaders.

**Strategist.** Generates organizational and personal transformations. Exercises the power of mutual inquiry, vigilance, and vulnerability for both the short and long term. 4% of leaders.

**Alchemist.** Generates social transformations. Integrates material, spiritual, and societal transformation. 1% of leaders.

Understanding DJT’s Enneagram Type *and* stage of development gives us a richer method of interpreting him than his Type alone. If he is operating from the Opportunist stage, this reveals new insights and helps us make sense of his Enneagram Type. Here is how Susanne Cook-Greuter, a leading adult development researcher, describes the Opportunist—which, let’s remember, is a stage that can be occupied by *any* personality type.

The Opportunist is aware of his or her physical strength and size (or status power) and may use it to intimidate others in order to get what they want. Opportunists are generally wary of others’ intentions and tend to anticipate the worst. Everything to them is a war of wills. Life is a zero sum game. It is important to realize that much aggression may stem from profound uncertainty, a sense of vulnerability and being confronted by a world whose

rules they may not actually understand. In a self-protective move, Opportunists may be aggressive to pre-empt expected strikes of others. They are people of action, not of thought and planning...When Opportunists lose a test of will, or overstep a boundary, they see the cause as outside themselves. They get frustrated and tend to show free-flowing anger and hostility. Others are to blame, never oneself. Their own anger towards the world is projected outward. Thus others are experienced as angry all the time. Self-protective people have an expedient morality. Actions are only bad if one is caught and punished. When caught, people at this stage are shameless and show little remorse. They do not feel responsible for failure or trouble they cause because they do not yet understand the connection between action and consequences, that is, linear causality. Blaming others for one's shortcomings is a way to protect oneself.

Does this sound like anyone we've been talking about?

The adult development expert I met for coffee thought so. And she's not alone. Bill Torbert recently [wrote](#) this about DJT:

If one looks at Trump's daily behavior patterns, he sure looks like an Opportunist. He is famous for his short time span of attention, evident in his tweets, his inability to let others speak more than a sentence at a time in his presence (e.g. Mike Pence on "60 Minutes"), and his inability to develop coherent policy, let alone write his own autobiography. He is particularly famous for his flamboyant use of unilateral executive power, as in "You're fired!" He focuses on concrete things (real estate, buildings, golf courses, "The Wall," his name in gold). He rejects critical feedback out of hand, externalizing blame and mounting counter-attacks (such as law suits) until attention shifts to other issues. He exhibits hostile humor (e.g. mimicking a disabled journalist). He flouts sexuality and treats as legitimate "whatever one can get away with."

Torbert's assessment is about developmental stage, but it affects our assessment of Type. What if DJT's Eight-like behaviors could just as easily be explained by his stage of development? To repeat an earlier point, it means that he *could* be an Eight, but he doesn't *have* to be.

DJT himself offers evidence for this view. He's been quoted as saying that his own temperament hasn't changed since first grade. This may be another one of his many falsehoods. However, if we take it seriously, that means he feels like the same person now as he did when he was smack dab in the center of—yes, you guessed it—the Opportunist stage.

This suggests two things to any of us who have concluded that DJT is an Eight. First, we might hold this assessment more lightly. Second, we might be curious to take a second look at the arguments against—and for—Three.

## THE CASE AGAINST TYPE THREE

In her post on DJT, Bea Chestnut also makes a case for why he is not a Three. I don't think it's as strong as her argument for Eight, but it is resonating with many people online, so I'd like to address it point by point. The key question for me is this: just because DJT doesn't act and sound like most Threes that we know, and just because many of our Three friends say "He's no Three," does this mean that he cannot be a Three? Or is it possible that DJT is a Three who is hard to recognize because he is so less mature and emotionally healthy than the Threes around us?

### DESIRE FOR ADMIRATION

Chestnut writes:

Threes care about image. Ask any actual Three if they would say any of the extreme racist and sexist statements Trump said nearly every day of the 2-year campaign in public and I guarantee you they will say no. Threes want to win, but they want to look good and be (widely) admired while they are doing it. While some people admire Trump, many also dislike him and all he stands for. I don't know any Threes who would mock a disabled reporter, or criticize a specific women's appearance on a public stage, or offend large groups of people on a regular basis.

I agree that most Threes wouldn't do these terrible things. But DJT isn't most Threes. He cares about different things because he's operating at a very early stage of development. As we've seen, an Opportunist of any Enneagram type frequently acts in self-defeating ways. An Opportunist who is a Three is desperate to maintain a self-image but lacks the reflective capacity to avoid others' disdain. More importantly, he simply does not *care* what everyone else thinks. His morality is egocentric, which means that he can neither put himself in others' shoes nor internalize what they care about, except fleetingly. The very actions that most mature and healthy Threes would avoid, like calling women "pigs" or Mexicans "rapists," come naturally to an Opportunist Three, particularly one projecting an image as a tough ethnocentric nationalist.

This is the case with DJT. He obsesses about his ratings and media coverage yet has a simple response to criticism: it's fake, and the people making it are losers. This is how he protects his fragile self-image from evidence that it's a farce. He lies—incessantly. This makes him a candidate not just for an Opportunist Three, but one who is at a low level of health in the Riso/Hudson framework. From *Personality Types*: "Because they are almost completely cut off from their conscience and their ability to discern the truth, [Unhealthy Threes] seem not to know what the truth about themselves is, and so do not feel guilty about deceiving others... They seem unable to

stop lying even if nothing significant depends on it since they are completely compulsive about making an impression.”

There is another reason that DJT is OK with people disliking him. Over the decades, he’s learned that this doesn’t interfere with his success and bolsters his self-image of a hard-nosed leader. According to biography Michael D’Antonio, DJT didn't get respect from Wall Street or business leaders but didn't need them. "What Trump understands is that anyone he might offend by, say, calling Obama 'Psycho' rejected him long ago, and those who like him will draw nearer."

The issue for DJT then, is not whether an action offends any particular group, but how it affects his ability to be seen as a strong winner. In the spring of 1987, when Tony Schwartz sent DJT the manuscript for *The Art of the Deal*, DJT returned it promptly with “a few red marks made with a fat-tipped Magic Marker, most of which deleted criticisms that Trump had made of powerful individuals he no longer wanted to offend, such as Lee Iacocca. Otherwise, Schwartz says, Trump changed almost nothing.”

The way this played out in the Presidential race was laughable. DJT wouldn’t apologize or retract his insults, because doing this would be too threatening to his self-image. Instead, he would make half-hearted declarations of how he saw himself. “Nobody respects women more than me.” “I love the Mexicans.” “I’m the least racist person you’ve ever met.” Although ridiculous on the surface, these statements are exactly what you would expect from an unhealthy Three desperate to buttress a fragile self-image.

## **CHALLENGING ORDER, NOT CREATING IMAGE AND GOALS**

Chestnut writes:

Threes succeed by creating an image and working to achieve clear goals; Trump succeeded by channeling anger and the desire to rebel against the established order.

What Chestnut calls “channeling anger” we also might call the creation and projection of images calculated to win votes. Consider race. DJT’s early real estate ventures discriminated against African Americans, but opposition to minorities was peripheral at best to his brand. For decades, he built an image around success, wealth, and publicity. (But not too elitist! He portrayed himself as a tough Queens guy who had earned everything himself so middle class folks would use his slot machines and watch *The Apprentice*). Only upon entering politics did he remake his image around economic nationalism and “toughness” toward Muslims, Mexicans, and immigrants. Why? To win working class white votes. Consider, too, his slippery yet effective argument that he had gamed the system so well for so many years that he was the best (actually, “only”) person to

change it. “My whole life I’ve been greedy,” he said. “Now I’m going to be greedy for you.” You may not buy this story, but millions of people did, and it was one he custom-designed for Presidential politics.

## **POWER AND DOMINANCE, NOT PRODUCTIVITY**

Chestnut writes:

Trump does not think in terms of tasks and goals and productivity, he thinks in terms of power and dominance and strength and control and rebellion.

People at the Opportunist stage of development are rarely good at planning. Their time horizon is too short, and their desire for immediate gratification too intense. In addition, according to Don Riso and Russ Hudson, unhealthy Threes have “little of the goal-orientation of the healthy Threes. They are continually responding to situations as if their own sense of values...is missing.” Thus, what Chestnut writes here is consistent with a Three who is (a) at the Opportunist stage and/or (b) unhealthy.

Is there evidence of DJT’s ability to manage projects to completion? Absolutely, but you have to look earlier in his career, back when he was more builder than celebrity. At age 29, according to biographer Wayne Barrett, DJT successfully managed the complex process of converting the decrepit Commodore hotel near Manhattan’s Grand Central Terminal into a new Grand Hyatt: “He had a focus on detail, he was a real builder. He was at the Hyatt site every day...checking out every detail. He was a manager and a builder, inherited from his father.” Michael D’Antonio agrees: “First, he set an ambitious goal. Then he focused on it relentlessly, devoting years of effort to the task and refusing to be deterred by obstacles that would have stopped someone with less confidence.”

It’s likely that during his builder years DJT was operating from the Expert stage, which is two stages of development beyond the Opportunist. The Expert is guided by craft logic rather than impulse and, according to Susanne Cook-Greuter, has “access to some self-understanding [and is] interested in discovering the kinds of behaviors that make them successful and respected.” Managing complex details would have required this skill. It’s plausible that DJT had access to capacities of the more complex Achiever stage, like setting medium-term goals, managing time, and making rational decisions. Either way, when you look at his behaviors during these years, you find someone who resembles the Three of most modern organizations.

What happened to this person? Why isn’t he visible today in the White House?

One clue appears in a [roundtable](#) that *Politico* convened in March 2016 of his five leading biographers. In 1983, after completing the Trump Tower, DJT stopped being a builder and shifted to being a celebrity. According to all of the biographers, this was a crucial shift in his life. The publicity he received from these construction projects and, soon thereafter, his first book, was addictive. The man, his biographers agree, was longing for love and found a distorted form of it in this public attention. So he started devoting more time to reading press clippings about himself, returning reporters' calls for hours on end, and showing up at glamorous events—and very little building tangible things.

Here is my hypothesis: DJT's preoccupation with glitter rather than substance created a vicious circle that over time not only halted his maturing process, but set it back two stages to the Opportunist.

This scenario matches Riso and Hudson's description of the Three in declining health. As a builder, DJT resembled the level 5 "image-conscious pragmatist" and the level 6 "self-promoting narcissist" with frequent dips into level 7 "dishonest opportunism." His shift to celebrity in the mid 1980s reflected and reinforced a deepening narcissism. From *Personality Types*: "Threes fear that others will see through them and discover that they are not really the fantastic 'all together' image they are trying to project. At this point, to be exposed as less than their idealized image would cause complete humiliation, so Threes 'up the ante' and shift into an overdrive of self-promotion to impress others...and make their own situations worse."

In the late 1980s, DJT made a flurry of risky investments in casinos, hotels, an airline, you name it—and burdened himself with debt. Whatever capacity he once had for logic and reason withered into nothing. Then came the first of many business bankruptcies and the highly publicized end of his first marriage. These failures and DJT's response to them plunged him into level 8, "the malicious deceiver" who lies pathologically and "will say whatever gets them what they want with the least trouble."

This is the DJT we know today. He cannot manage projects or stay focused on a single goal because the web of deception in which he is entangled makes this impossible.

## **BULL IN CHINA SHOP, NOT CHAMELEON**

Chestnut writes:

Threes are chameleons—they have a talent for fitting in to different contexts, for blending in and matching the image of success in different milieus—does this sound like Donald Trump? He’s more the bull in the China shop than the person who identifies and becomes the perfect image of success.

I’d say that DJT is the bull in the China shop *and* the person focused on a successful image. The bull is the Opportunist. The image-maker is the Enneagram Three.

And the chameleon? It’s easier to spot in the 1980s and 90s but visible today if you look below the headlines into his private behaviors. Let’s start with the macro level shapeshifting that happened over months and years. DJT did not barge into Presidential politics as the man behind the Apprentice nor as the pro-choice liberal whose top mentors in adulthood, Roy Cohn and Roger Stone, were/are gay. He captured the spotlight with a targeted appeal to racial grievance through the birther movement. When he launched his campaign, he took his existing brand as a “winner” and meshed it with a new focus on economic nationalism and “criminal” minorities. He changed his brand to win.

Since the election, although DJT has kept numerous promises, he has shown a willingness to shape shift his policies to meet the needs of Congress. For example, except for ending the TPP, the economic nationalist is MIA.

On a micro level, DJT was quite the chameleon in his heyday as a business celebrity. Here is evidence of how he shape shifted for his audience:

- In his famous 1990 Playboy interview, he was asked, “You seem very pleasant and charming during interviews, yet you talk constantly about toughness. Do you put on an act for us?”
- According to D’Antonio, throughout DJT’s career, “by saying almost everything, Trump created a record that allowed him to appeal to various kinds of people depending on what he hoped to achieve.” And when negotiating casino deals in Atlantic City, he “had a way of talking—sharing supposed secrets, offering praise, extending sympathies—that created a synthetic form of friendship.”

- In the words of Gwenda Blair, author of *The Trumps*, “He’s the master of saying one thing, and then, 10 minutes later, you’re seeing the opposite. What is it that he stands for? He’s a moving target, and you never exactly know.”
- Tony Schwartz observed DJT on countless phone calls. From the [July 2016 New Yorker](#): “On the phone with business associates, Trump would flatter, bully, and occasionally get mad, but always in a calculated way. Before the discussion ended, Trump would ‘share the news of his latest success,’ Schwartz says. Instead of saying goodbye at the end of a call, Trump customarily signed off with ‘You’re the greatest!’”

Chestnut contrasts DJT’s public bullying and vengeful tweets with the on-camera appeal of both John Edwards and Lance Armstrong. She attributes this difference to Enneagram type. That’s plausible. But an equally plausible explanation is developmental stage. DJT is an Opportunist. Edwards and Armstrong both were operating from at least the Expert stage—two stages more advanced than the Opportunist. Experts, unlike Opportunists, “have access to some self-understanding [and] are interested in discovering the kinds of behaviors that make them successful and respected.” To simplify, whereas an Opportunist just acts out, an Expert uses the logic of their craft (e.g. public speaking) to guide their actions. A Three operating at the Expert stage, like Edwards and Armstrong, is substantially more skilled at projecting desirable images than a Three at the Opportunist stage. This would explain why Edwards and Armstrong were popular for so long. Their skill at projecting a positive image helped them conceal the shadow behaviors they practiced behind closed doors—until, that is, they were finally caught.

## **SINGLING OUT ONE GROUP, NOT EVERYONE**

Chestnut writes

Threes read their audience and adjust their image to be what others see as successful and attractive. Trump seems to understand a specific sector of his audience—the people who voted for him. But Threes usually don’t just single out a particular group they try to appeal to. Threes read their audience and skillfully shape their appearance and their messages to appeal to all the people.

Once again, developmental theory is helpful here. A Three operating at the Opportunist stage can single out the crowd in front of him but lacks the capacity to consider *any other crowd*. For to do this requires a reflective capacity that he does not possess (unless, of course, he is reading a speech that someone else has written, which is a different matter entirely). Furthermore, it is not only possible but *highly likely* that this person’s appeal will be as narrow as his own moral span—that

is, egocentric and ethnocentric. About “Me” and “Us,” but not “All of Us.” DJT’s behaviors fit this description to a tee.

## **WHAT ACTUAL THREES SAY**

Chestnut writes

And if you still don’t believe me, ask any actual Type Three you know if they think Trump is a Three. All the Threes I know say absolutely not.

I believe Chestnut, though my interpretation is different. Most Threes operating at the Expert stage or beyond wouldn’t recognize DJT as a Three, because he looks like a different species. And he is! Not because he’s a different Enneagram type (though he may be—again there are good arguments on both sides), but because he’s operating at a much earlier stage of development. He acts more like these Threes did when they were little kids. “Does DJT remind you of what you were like at age seven?” Ask that question, and I think Chestnut might get a different answer.

## THE CASE AGAINST TYPE EIGHT

To review, we first examined the case for Eight. Conclusion: DJT *could* be an Eight but does not *have* to be. Then we examined the case against Three. Conclusion: his behaviors are consistent with Type Three. We complete our assessment by looking at the case against Eight and, in the final section, the case for Three.

Showing that DJT is not an Eight isn't easy. As we've seen, he displays many classic Eight behaviors. It also may not be necessary if we find overwhelming evidence for Three. Still, there is evidence against Eight worth examining.

### **EIGHTS VALUE INDEPENDENCE, SUSPECT OTHERS' MOTIVES, AND ARE DIFFICULT TO MANIPULATE. DJT IS EVERYONE'S PUPPET**

On the surface, DJT is the tough boss, barking orders, and having his way with people. Yet he's also known as "Putin's puppet," "Bannon's puppet," and someone Congressional leaders are manipulating for their own ends. After the health care débâcle, Ezra Klein [wrote](#) that Paul Ryan "played" DJT by flattering him as the most "deep, involved and engaged" president he'd ever seen on major legislation. In earlier years, when DJT was feeling low, his longtime executive assistant, Norma Foerderer, would pop in videotapes of him celebrating a success "for his instant gratification."

It's quite a paradox. On the one hand, he's in charge. On the other, he's prey to others' machinations. How do we make sense of this?

Pete Hamill, former editor of the *New York Daily News*, followed DJT closely for years. Here's his explanation: "The bulls--t tough guy. The guy is all mouth and couldn't fight his way out of an empty lot."

Translation: the tough guy is an image DJT has constructed and continues to construct every moment. He wants us to think that he is domineering, but in day to day life, he is easily manipulated by shrewd people.

## **EIGHTS ARE LOYAL TO AND PROTECTIVE OF PEOPLE UNLESS BETRAYED. DJT TREATS EVEN CLOSE ALLIES AS EXPENDABLE**

A few examples:

- When DJT's mentor, Roy Cohn, was struggling legally and suffering from AIDS, DJT moved his business to other law firms. Cohn had done nothing to provoke these actions and felt abandoned.
- DJT fired two employees at Trump Tower when Johnny Carson said they stole his vicuña coat. Months later, Carson found the coat in his home closet. Twenty years later, according to D'Antonio, DJT "seemed certain that he had done the right thing: it would've been a mistake to stand up to Carson and defend his workers. Celebrities were worth the trouble."
- After withdrawing from the GOP primary, Chris Christie endorsed DJT even though DJT had publicly belittled him. Not long thereafter, DJT humiliated Christie multiple times on TV. Ultimately, despite Christie's loyalty (and public sector experience), DJT fired him from his role as transition team chair when the Bridgegate scandal re-erupted.

## **EIGHTS STEP UP TO LEADERSHP TO FILL ENERGETIC VACUUMS. DJT IGNORES LEVERS OF POWER, INSTEAD CHOOSING TO FOCUS ON PR.**

Newly elected Presidents have enormous opportunities to wield power. They have hundreds of executive positions to fill, legislation to shepherd, an organization of 1.4 million employees to oversee and senior staff to lead. If DJT were an Eight, you would expect him to be in constant motion on these activities. Even if he were an unhealthy Eight, he'd be pushing hard to make things happen. Is he?

The evidence suggests that he is not. Yes, he is in constant motion, working 20-hour-days, but in pursuit of what? He's filled fewer positions than any recent predecessor, and this includes roles not requiring Senate approval. Congress has been slow to move legislation, largely because his legislative leadership has been AWOL. Even his senior team, like the campaign apparatus before it, is minuscule—purportedly because he likes to be lean. Might that be a sign he values efficiency over the application of control? Finally, although he supposedly detests bureaucracy, he's doing very little apart from budget decisions to affect it.

Where is the desire to make decisions, issue commands, and wield power? If you trust the press, it's notably absent. Instead, as we've seen, DJT spends hours each day tracking how Fox News covers him, responding to slights from celebrities, and sending tweets to boast or complain. It feels frenetic. It seems like he's trying to control things. And maybe he's exerting influence in ways invisible to us. But by most measures, his time is dedicated less to making stuff happen than to defending his reputation. How many Eights at any level of health do this?

Now you could argue that watching TV stories about yourself is an expression of Eight-like lust. Call it the lust for attention and recognition. But isn't this just a backhanded way of describing vanity, the passion of the Three?

### **EIGHTS FACE CHALLENGES DIRECTLY. DJT AVOIDS BAD NEWS, WON'T FIRE PEOPLE DIRECTLY, AND PLAYS FAKE CHARACTERS**

Here we get to the genius of DJT's image making. He describes himself as a tough and direct manager, yet his day-to-day behavior suggests otherwise:

- Unlike most Eights, DJT not only doesn't seek out bad news, but he actively avoids it. He prefers what's positive to what's true. Here is Tim O'Brien, author of *Trump Nation*: "Jack O'Donnell is a case study of that in the casino business. He routinely brought Donald bad news, but Donald either ignored it or pretended it didn't exist. Any number of people who have worked with him in his real estate dealings in New York will tell similar stories."
- DJT's most famous phrase is "You're fired!" He said this in every episode of *The Apprentice*. Yet people who've worked for him tell a different story. According to Barbara Res, the top construction engineer on Trump Tower, "Maybe Donald can unceremoniously say, 'You're fired,' to actors on a TV show, but in real life, he hated to do it. When someone had to be fired, Donald laid the job off on an underling." Recently, DJT took two weeks to fire Mike Flynn after learning about Flynn's deception. There are many possible explanations. According to Res, maybe Donald "thought somebody else could do it for him. That's why it took him so long. He really doesn't like to fire people."
- At many times in his career, DJT used the greatest form of indirectness to deliver a tough message: false identities. Reporters received calls from "John Barron," VP of the Trump Organization, or Trump publicist "John Miller." Both voices sounded like DJT's. One explanation is that DJT wanted plausible deniability: if "John Barron" or "John Miller" made the call, DJT could always claim later that he knew nothing about it or disagreed. Could an Eight do this? Of course, but it's far from typical Eight behavior.

## THE CASE FOR TYPE THREE

So far we've seen that DJT *could* be a Three and is *probably not* an Eight. Our last step is to offer evidence that he *probably is* a Three.

The Riso/Hudson framework describes healthy, average, and unhealthy versions of each Type. In this section, I draw upon their descriptions of the average and unhealthy Three. It's a story of an image-oriented self that becomes increasingly desperate, deceptive, and hollow as it declines in health. How well does this story match DJT's life over the past half century? As it turns out, remarkably—and sadly—well.

### ENNEAGRAM RANGES OF HEALTH

According to Russ Hudson and Don Riso, each Enneagram type can exist at three possible ranges of health: healthy, average, and unhealthy. (Actually, they describe nine levels of health, three in each range, but we'll keep it simple here). As a Type Six, I look, sound, think, and act differently when I am operating in the healthy range than when in the average or unhealthy range. The same is true for everyone.

Enneagram ranges of health may sound like stages of ego development, but they describe different phenomena and come from different research methodologies. The biggest distinction is that everyone starts life at the earliest stage of development and then progresses through later stages as they mature. In contrast, the Enneagram ranges of health do not arise sequentially in life.

### DJT AS AVERAGE THREE

“Because average Threes experience themselves as commodities, they become obsessed with how they come across to others...[They] are masters of jargon, supreme manipulators of symbols to effect their ends.”—Riso/Hudson, *Personality Types*

**The Image-Conscious Pragmatist:** Slick, calculated, creates appearance of intimacy, seem perfect to others, takes multiple sides of an issue.

**The Self-Promoting Narcissist:** Relentlessly takes credit, shamelessly inflates accomplishments, craves attention.

The evidence from DJT's life:

- DJT's public image is "the overarching project of his lifetime." —Biographer Michael D'Antonio
- "Trump buys them with a smile, a phone call or a display of wealth that so excites these poor fools that they cannot wait to herald his brilliance."—Jimmy Breslin, newspaper columnist also from Queens
- "He had prided himself on never having met a public official, a banker, a lawyer, a reporter, or a prosecutor he couldn't seduce."—Biographer Wayne Barrett
- "He thinks there's no cat he can't charm out of the tree, but then when you back him in, he goes crazy."—Biographer Harry Hurt
- "I found him to be quick-witted, funny and charming."—Michael D'Antonio
- "I think he wants to be noticed." —Ivana Trump, DJT's first wife, interviewed two decades after their divorce
- "Salesmen, and Trump is nothing if not a brilliant salesman, specialize in simulated intimacy rather than the real thing"—Mark Singer, *New Yorker* profile in 1997
- "Trump's vaunted art of the deal has given way to the art of 'image ownership.' By appearing to exert control over assets that aren't necessarily his—at least not in ways that his pronouncements suggest—he exercises his real talent: using his name as a form of leverage."—Mark Singer
- "Trump didn't fit any model of human being I'd ever met. He was obsessed with publicity, and he didn't care what you wrote...It's impossible to keep him focussed on any topic, other than his own self-aggrandizement, for more than a few minutes, and even then..."—Tony Schwartz
- "At his own father's funeral, he did not stop patting himself on the back and promoting himself."—Biographer Gwenda Blair
- "Later, Trump said to me, "You want to know what total recognition is? I'll tell you how you know you've got it. When the Nigerians on the street corners who don't speak a word

of English, who have no clue, who're selling watches for some guy in New Jersey—when you walk by and those guys say, 'Trump! Trump!' That's total recognition.”—Mark Singer

- “A securities analyst who has studied Trump’s peregrinations for many years believes, ‘Deep down, he wants to be Madonna.’”—Mark Singer
- “He is strongly committed to his personal project of being the president, being seen as a great dealmaker, and appearing on television, but he is weakly committed to his ideological project and obviously uninterested in the details of legislation.”—Ezra Klein
- For decades, DJT began each day reviewing clippings of stories about himself in the global media.
- DJT has always been sensitive to media stories about his wealth. One time, after reading that he was excluded from the list of the 500 wealthiest people, he called *Forbes* editors to argue his case.
- The hallways of the Trump Organization are filled with framed photos of magazine covers of him.
- BBC reporter Selina Scott was” appalled” by how he treated women yet said, "He can be effusive. He's been trained to turn in the charm."

### **DJT AS UNHEALTHY THREE**

“Because they are almost completely cut off from their conscience and their ability to discern the truth, they seem not to know what the truth about themselves is, and so do not feel guilty about deceiving others...They seem unable to stop lying even if nothing significant depends on it since they are completely compulsive about making an impression.”—Riso/Hudson, *Personality Types*

**The Dishonest Opportunist:** must win, exploitative, stealing, hostile.

**The Malicious Deceiver:** Completely deceptive, unhinged, cannot tell what the truth is, remorseless.

The evidence from DJT's life:

- “Lying is second nature to him. More than anyone else I have ever met, Trump has the ability to convince himself that whatever he is saying at any given moment is true, or sort of true, or at least *ought* to be true...He lied strategically. He had a complete lack of conscience about it.”—Tony Schwartz
- “Trump seemed an ideal subject for us, as apt a symbol of the gaudy 1980s as a Christian Lacroix pouf skirt—and just as shiny and inflated. Lacroix at least used excellent materials. Trump turned out to be the king of ersatz. Not just fake, but false. He lied about everything, with gusto. But that was not immediately apparent. Not to me, anyway.”—Susan Mulcahy, New York City tabloid reporter
- “Who, really, is Donald Trump? What’s behind the actor’s mask? I can discern little more than narcissistic motivations and a complementary personal narrative about winning at any cost. It is as if Trump has invested so much of himself in developing and refining his socially dominant role that he has nothing left over to create a meaningful story for his life, or for the nation. It is always Donald Trump playing Donald Trump, fighting to win, but never knowing why.” [Psychologist Dan McAdams](#)
- “Somewhere on this odyssey of his, the image had devoured the man, and Donald had become the commercially useful personality he had helped invent. To some of those who watched him closely, he no longer behaved as if he believed he was merely living; he was now, in his own mind, portraying himself in a thrilling daily drama he scripted.”—Michael D’Antonio

## IMPLICATIONS

Perhaps you are now persuaded that DJT is a Three, rather than an Eight. So what?

I see three implications:

1. **For citizens intent on removing DJT from office.** Understanding what motivates him provides different answers to the following important questions: What are the scenarios in which DJT would voluntarily step down? What might you do to increase the odds of these scenarios coming to pass? Conversely, what are the scenarios in which DJT would melt down into a vindictive psychopath? What might you do to decrease—or unwittingly increase—the odds of this happening? On the whole, what does this suggest for the strategies of citizen activists, elected officials, and journalists?
2. **For the Enneagram community.** Taking into account a person's stage of development yields new insights that affect our understanding of their Type. How might this shift the way we conduct typing interviews, assess Type from questionnaires, and coach people?
3. **For all of us.** The story of a Three disintegrating in health is tragically sad. DJT is a man who has never truly felt his or anyone's heart. He longs for love but is incapable of contacting it. This makes him a menace to the world. It also makes him a human worthy of compassion. This is not a call for letting him off the hook. On the contrary. What I've found is that the more compassion I feel for him, the greater my resolve that it's time for him to go. The necessary path forward, when unencumbered by my own rage, becomes strikingly obvious. Perhaps you will find the same to be true for you.

## **GROW YOUR MIND. HEAR REMARKABLE INTERVIEWS**

One day a few years ago, I realized that I am a better interviewer than writer, particularly when compared with the stars in either field. And I love asking people I admire about their ideas and experiences. This was the genesis of my podcast, The Amiel Show, which helps you grow as a leader, coach, and human being. Look for me on iTunes or Stitcher. Even better, [click here](#) to get my weekly email updates with the latest podcast episodes and Jedi Leadership Tricks.

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Amiel Handelsman is an executive coach, host of The Amiel Show leadership podcast, and author of *Practice Greatness: Escape Small Thinking, Listen Like A Master, And Lead With Your Best*. You can learn more about his work at [amielhandelsman.com](http://amielhandelsman.com).