

i introvert insights

Sometimes, *Relative* Silence Isn't Enough—We Need the Real Thing

Several months ago, during one of our long winter nights here in northern Minnesota, I stepped outside during a movie-like, gentle snowfall and found myself enveloped by nature's epic version of noise-canceling headphones.

Enormous snowflakes not only turned the sky white, they drowned out every last bit of ambient sound around me: street traffic, the nearby railroad tracks, the wind. All of it.

For a few delightful moments, I really was walking (or at least standing) in a winter wonderland.

The other day, I was similarly treated to a snack of palpable quiet, if only briefly, when my family and I were kayaking on Lake Itasca, the source for the Mississippi River.

On a whim, we paddled our way out to a small island in the distance, battling a considerable headwind all the while. When we arrived, though, we found ourselves in placid waters, away from every sound except that of our own voices. The silence was jarring. And on that beautiful sunny day, it was golden, too.

Every once in a while, you stumble upon true silence. Not the cheap

knock-off brand of "silence" that we usually settle for, which typically constitutes nothing more than a **relative** lack of noise. I mean utter, total, absolute silence. The kind of silence you notice because it's so rare and so jolting.

The kind of silence you hear.

As introverts especially, we need to do more than merely stumble upon this type of silence; we can't leave it to chance. We need to actively seek it out, despite the extra work that is sometimes involved.

And if you're convinced that you can't afford to take the time? Well, science is increasingly telling us that we can't afford not to.

Silent Regeneration

In 2013, the journal *Brain Structure & Function* published a fascinating article on a study in which mice were exposed to various types of noise—as well as to silence.

The researchers monitoring the effects on the mice's brains were surprised by something that happened in what was intended to be the con-

October 2018

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TIPS, TRICKS, AND TOOLS

SELF-CARE AT WORK

You Don't Need Long Breaks to Recharge Your Batteries

In Introvert Fantasyland, you'd get a least one lengthy, uninterrupted opportunity at work each day to refuel your psychological gas tank.

But for most of us, reality gets in the way; you can't recharge yourself on the job the same way you recharge your cell phone each night.

So look instead for shorter, more frequent ways to recharge repeatedly throughout the day. Just a minute or two will do more for your psyche than you might think.

Higher education writer Amma Marfo—author of *The I's Have It: Reflections on Introversion in Student Affairs*—refers to these mini-breaks as “quick charge” moments. And you can pursue them in a variety of quite simple forms.

Spend a little extra time in the restroom. Yes, it sounds ridiculous. But really: Who's going to notice—let alone bother—you if you're holed



up in a bathroom stall for an extra five minutes?

Find a quiet room. Many workplaces have conference rooms or small work rooms where you can get away from the din and concentrate on yourself, and/or your work.

Go outside. If you work primarily inside, get outside once or twice a day. No need to take a long walk;

you likely don't have the time anyway. Just get a few gulps of fresh air and then head back inside.

Try—for real—deep breathing. It might be easy to pooh-pooh this one. Don't. Try it right now: Take three intentionally extended, unusually deep breaths. No, your problems aren't instantly cured. But take note: You do feel a bit calmer.

SUCCESSFUL SOCIALIZING

Social Gatherings Deplete Energy Before and After, Too

If you don't exactly love going to parties or participating in other social activities, you're far from alone as an introvert.

But you're also not alone if you still at least sometimes want—or, more likely, need—to go to them.

Whatever your preferences when it comes to large social gatherings, and whatever the reasons behind them, Aaron Caycedo-Kimura has some wise advice for you.

“It's important to keep in mind that socializing isn't only about the event itself,” says Caycedo-Kimura, author of the book *Text, Don't Call: An Illustrated Guide to the Introverted Life*.

“It's a complete mental and emotional experience that encompasses the anticipation before, the actual gathering, and the unwinding after,” Caycedo-Kimura stresses in a recent piece for the website *Signature*.

In other words, whenever you know that you'll be attending a so-

cial event, you need to take care of yourself not only during the event itself, but also ahead of it and once it's done.

Beforehand: If possible, build in a break between whatever you're doing beforehand and the event itself. And to the degree you can, be low-key the day of the gathering.

Afterward: Get some rest, and if you can, tweak your schedule to build in some downtime. Above all else, try not to attend another social gathering immediately after the first.

Leverage the Opinions of the People Who Know You Best

If, like many introverts, you're put off by the "self-promotion" feel of talking about yourself and your skills and accomplishments—so much so that you won't actually go ahead and do it—you might find it helpful to take a quasi third-person approach to the task.

That doesn't mean you need to become Bob Dole or Elmo, both of whom are known for speaking about themselves in the third person ("Bob Dole has been tested..."; "Elmo loves his goldfish...").

Instead, it simply means harnessing the thoughts of people who know you well, and then using what **they**

say about you when you're trying to put your best foot forward.

Suppose, for example, that you're interviewing for a new job. You can be sure you'll be asked, in some form, what your strengths are and what you'll bring to the new position (and the organization) if hired.

With practice, you can talk about your strengths in the first person the way you typically would—e.g., "I'm a good writer and a solid researcher" or "I work well with other people." These are solid responses, especially if you can back them up with examples offering supporting evidence.

If, however, you put just a slight, "third-person" twist on this strategy, it becomes even more powerful.

For example: "The people who have worked with me the most would tell you that I'm an excellent writer who is good at research, too."

Or: "Colleagues have often told me that they admire my ability to work with people with diverse opinions and perspectives. They say I'm good at hearing people out, synthesizing what's being said, and building consensus."

In the first-person approach, you run the risk of feeling ill at ease, which in turn puts you at risk of not effectively representing yourself.

But if you use the third-person approach, you can simply report the opinions of others—who will then do your talking for you.

YOUR DAILY ENVIRONMENT

The Light of Your Life Affects Your Life—So Choose Wisely

Have you seen the light?

I really had no idea how much light can affect me as an introvert until I somehow started finally noticing the existence of light!

Think about it: The lighting in our lives is so ubiquitous that we rarely give it any thought. It's just there, so much so that, under normal circumstances, we don't even consciously acknowledge its existence.

But as interior designer Paul Miller recently stressed in an article on the Realtor.com website: "Lighting plays a huge role in how we relax and renew our energy."

From an introvert's perspective, I couldn't have said it any better.

Everyone is affected differently, of course, by different types of lighting. Here are some light-related discoveries I've made in my own life. Perhaps they will help you, too.

Fluorescent light takes a toll. In the workplace especially, you often can't get around fluorescent lighting. Schools, hospitals, stores—fluorescent lights are everywhere, and that is unlikely to change.

To the degree you can, then, minimize it in your life.

My wife Adrienne, for example, a kindergarten teacher, routinely uses only a portion of the fluorescent lights in her classroom.

Natural light is rejuvenating. Maybe it's because I live in Minnesota—home of the six-month winter—but sunlight almost literally quenches a thirst in me at times.

Dim light relaxes. Maybe you're using a lantern on a camping trip. Perhaps you've purchased a salt lamp that makes your bedroom glow ever so slightly. Or maybe you've simply started using an incandescent lamp at work instead of the overhead lights.

If you're anything like me, you'll find these options calming.

Candles and campfire light soothe. A darkened dinner table lit only by a candle. A quiet campfire that serves as a prelude to s'mores. Does it get more soothing than that?



IT'S AN INTROVERT'S LIFE

Politicians: Are You Willing to Operate the Introvert's Way?

By Peter Vogt

The other day, when we arrived home exhausted from an event several hours away, I opened the front door to find yet another political flyer tucked inside. This time, it was left by a local woman (or, more likely, one of her volunteers) who is running for mayor and who, naturally, is letting the world know who she is by handing out brochures displaying her first name in 1,000-point font.

I was sorry to have missed our visitor, especially if it had indeed been the candidate herself—not an impossibility in our small city of 40,000. For this year more than any other, I have a game plan for when the candidates come calling.

I am ready.

Not to accost them, sick of non-stop political antics as I might be. I won't be getting on their case for "bothering" me, or crabbing at them to get the hell off my lawn.

On the contrary, I admire people who run for office. And I especially admire the relative few—by necessity the local candidates—who literally show up at my door willing to introduce themselves and talk about what they believe and what they plan to do if elected.

But this year, if and when I have the opportunity to talk to candidates face to face, I'm going to see how much introvert they have in them. Because we sure could use some introverted tricks of the trade in the current political climate.

What are the hallmarks of the in-

trovert? Well, there's the ongoing need for lots of quiet solitude and alone time, of course, but that's not what I'm getting at here.

I'm talking about the typical introvert's gifts for thinking deeply, reflecting carefully before making decisions and then communicating them, researching issues and potential solutions thoroughly. And, above all else, acknowledging that any contemporary problem you can name is multifaceted and complicated, and therefore cannot be solved via sound bite or campaign slogan.

For 15 years, I lived in the Minneapolis area, where every two years I consistently voted for a congressional representative who, by my calculations, disagreed with my stances about half the time and agreed with mine the other half. To me, this tally was evidence of critical, independent thinking on my representative's part.

A representative, after all, is supposed to **represent** me. That doesn't mean he/she should vote just like I would on every issue. Rather, he/she must stand in for me—be my actual representative—because I myself can't, for example, go to Washington and vote on matters myself.

I view every single candidate, for any office—local, state, national—through this lens. I am choosing a stand-in who will, on my behalf, think deeply, reflect carefully, research thoroughly, and acknowledge that the world is in fact gray, not black and/or white.

So when candidates show up on my doorstep in the month or so



ahead, I'll be posing to them two key questions followed by an invitation:

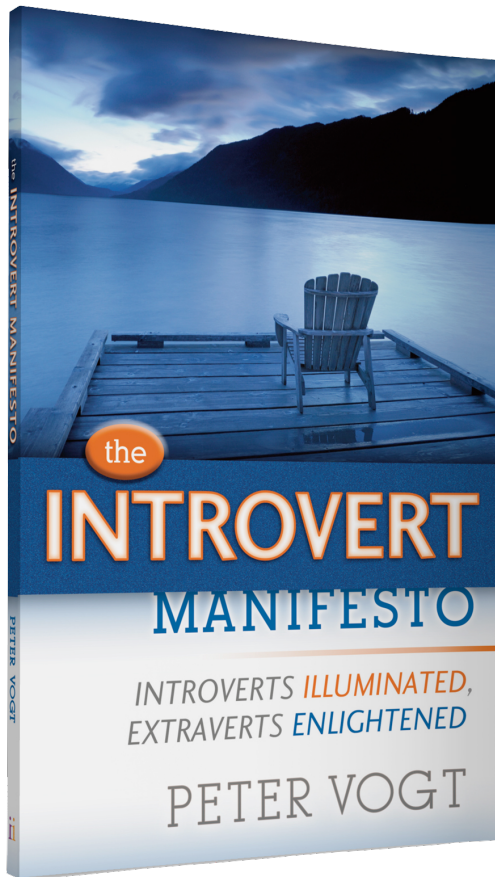
Question 1) Are you willing and able to think deeply, reflect carefully before making decisions and communicating them, research issues and potential solutions thoroughly, and, above all else, acknowledge that the problems we face are complex?

Question 2) Knowing full well you'll respond "yes" to No. 1 ... how do I know you're not full of it? Anyone can **say** yes to these things. You just did yourself. What proof do I have that your words today will match your actions tomorrow?

Invitation) I sincerely don't expect you to be able to respond to my questions right at this very moment, here on my doorstep. You say you're willing and able to think and reflect and research and consider. Are you willing and able, then, to take what I've asked you, walk around with it for a day or two or five, and then get back to me with a thoughtful reply?

The answers I get, and how I get them, will tell me all I need to know.

Introverts. Explained. Accurately.



That's the radically simple idea behind *The Introvert Manifesto: Introverts Illuminated, Extraverts Enlightened*, by Peter Vogt, editor and publisher of *Introvert Insights*.

Read extensive excerpts and order your paperback copy now at:

IntrovertManifesto.com

Also available on Amazon

RESEARCH YOU CAN USE

Right Before Bed, Write That To-Do List Out of Your Head

Writing—that faithful friend to many an introvert—might help you fall asleep faster at night if you do some just before bedtime.

It all depends, though, on what you write, according to an intriguing study in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*.

The study, which took place in a controlled sleep lab, involved 57 young adults who were asked to complete a short writing assignment five minutes before going to bed.

Some of the participants wrote about tasks they needed to complete over the next few days (i.e., a to-do list), while the others wrote about tasks they had already completed over the previous few days (i.e., an accomplishments list).

The participants in the to-do-list



group fell asleep significantly faster (about nine minutes) than the people in the accomplishments-list group.

“This finding is surprising in light of the evidence that unfinished tasks are a significant source of cognitive activation and worry,” the study researchers note.

“However, the key here seems to be that participants wrote their to-do

list rather than mentally ruminated about their unfinished tasks.”

The study also found that the more specifically participants wrote their to-do lists, the faster they subsequently fell asleep.

Sources: *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 147(1) (January 2018), pp. 139-146; *Psychology Today* website, January 12, 2018.

REFLECTIVE READS

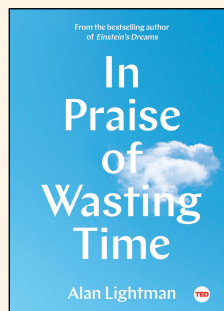
“Wasting Time” Will Preserve What We’re at Risk of Losing

In his compelling book *In Praise of Wasting Time*, author Alan Lightman asks a profound question amidst all the gains we have made as a society when it comes to technological innovation and economic advancement.

What have we **lost** in the process?

“If we are so crushed by our schedules, to-do lists, and hyperconnected media that we no longer have moments to think and reflect on both ourselves and the world, what have we lost?” Lightman writes.

“If we cannot sit alone in a quiet room with only our thoughts for ten



minutes, what have we lost? If we no longer have time to let our minds wander and roam without particular purpose, what have we lost?”

Though I would personally modify Lightman’s question slightly—to “what are we losing?”—his point is spot on. And in answering his own

question, he correctly notes that we are in danger of losing our creativity, our brain’s need for rest, and, worst of all, our inner self.

And the “sunlight and soil that nourish” that inner self, he argues, are two of the most-introverted yet potentially most-neglected activities around: solitude and reflection.

Is Lightman proposing that we cut ourselves off completely from today’s world? Not at all. Instead, he offers a simple compromise: “wasting time” for a half-hour each day. Being still and quiet in order to think and recharge—and thereby start recouping some of our losses.

Continued from page 1

trol group for the study: The mice that were exposed to two hours of total silence each day developed new brain cells in the hippocampus, an area of the brain that is associated with memory as well as learning and emotion.

The researchers theorize that the mice experienced this unexpected cell growth because silence is such an oddity, especially in the world of animals.

“Silence ... is highly atypical under wild conditions and must thus be perceived as alerting,” the researchers note in the study.

“Functional imaging studies indicate that trying to hear in silence activates the auditory cortex, putting ‘the sound of silence,’ the absence of expected sound, at the same level with actual sounds. ... The alert elicited by such unnatural silence might stimulate neurogenesis [brain cell growth] as preparation for future cognitive challenges.”

In other words, when you yourself are using total silence to rejuvenate as an introvert, you’re being more literal than you might have thought. You may be growing new brain cells that will contribute to your overall health and happiness.

That’s more crucial than ever in today’s buzzing world, where constant background noise is so commonplace that the only time we notice it is when it disappears. Perhaps that’s why a 2011 World Health Organization report called noise pollution a “modern plague.”

But you don’t have to fall prey to it. In fact, there are many simple things we all can do to prevent it—or cure it, as the case may be.

Intentionality Matters

I have found that my own moments of silence in life almost always involve nature. For me, purposefully pursuing total quiet involves taking a walk by the river or going on a hike in a forested area.

This, of course, might well be easier said than done if you live in a major urban area. But even then it is often entirely possible if you’re willing to go to where the quiet is. Last month, for example, my family and I spent a fun but frenetic day in New York City. Where did we eventually find relief from all the noise? In the shockingly calm Central Park.

Of course, you don’t necessarily have to be outside to cross paths with complete silence. Author Katherine Hauswirth (*The Book of Noticing*, 2017), writing recently in

Barbara Winter’s always enlightening *Winning Ways* newsletter, talked about the “delicious silence” she enjoyed a while back during a several-hour visit to the library of a Zen monastery:

“I could almost hear my synapses firing, and the many pages of notes I took were proof that the stacks held a welcome cache of inspiration.”

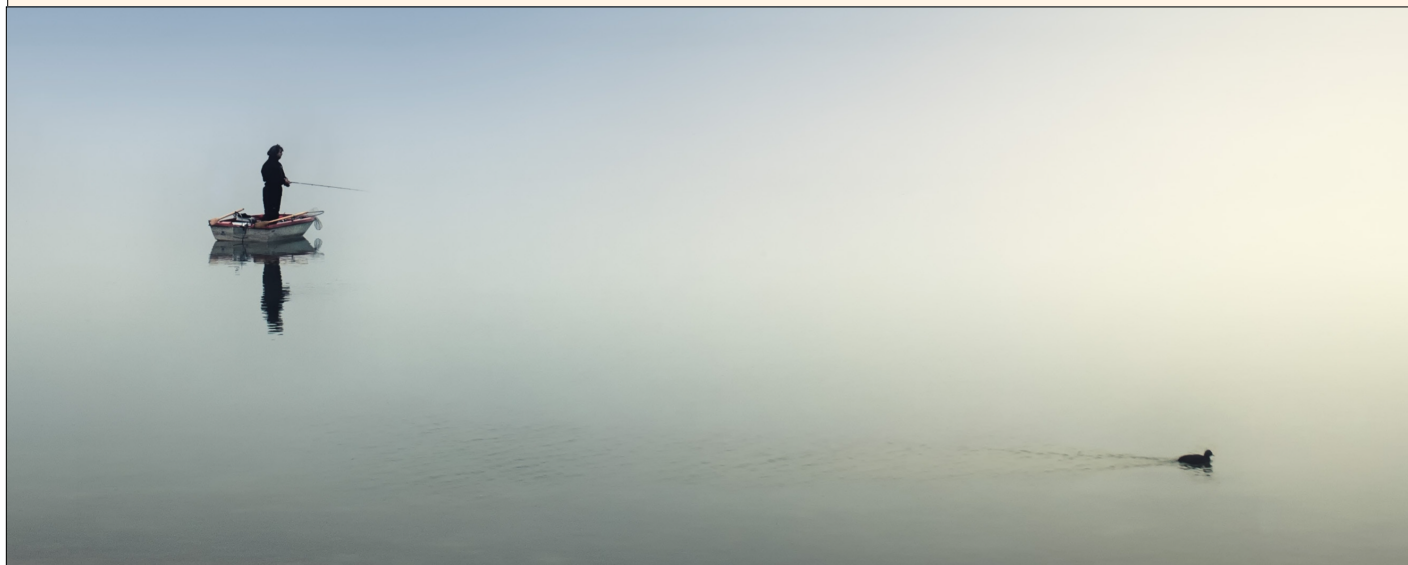
No Zen monastery nearby? (If I had a dime for every time I’ve heard that one...) A regular old public library works just fine. And with just a little intentional effort, so does your own home.

You don’t need hours of total quiet, either. Indeed, if you’re like most people, you’re a) not a mouse, who b) has a spare two hours each day to sit in utter silence.

No problem: You will find that mere minutes of silence will do wonders for you. If you can sit still and take a few deep breaths while you’re at it, so much the better.

Because it’s the intentionality that matters here. How you pursue total silence is irrelevant, as are where and even for how long.

That you pursue it each day—at least a little—is what counts.





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Introvert Insights is published monthly
by Introvert Insights, LLC, 1036 38th
Street South, Moorhead, MN 56560.

IntrovertInsights.com

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INTROVERT INSPIRATIONS

"A deep life is a good life."

~ Cal Newport

"You can't expect your strengths to shine if you're living in
the shadows of the extrovert ideal. You need to create an
environment that works in favor of your personality."

~ Tristan Lavender

"Follow effective action with quiet reflection. From the quiet
reflection will come even more effective action."

~ Peter Drucker

"The mind is sharper and keener in seclusion and uninterrupted
solitude. Originality thrives in seclusion, free of outside influen-
ces beating upon us to cripple the creative mind. Be alone—that
is the secret of invention. Be alone—that is when ideas are born."

~ Nikola Tesla

"To find yourself, think for yourself."

~ Socrates