

The logo for 'Introvert Insights' features a stylized lowercase 'i' in purple with a solid purple dot above it. To its right is another lowercase 'i' with a textured orange-to-yellow gradient and a matching textured dot above it. The word 'introvert' is written in a purple serif font, and 'insights' is written in a textured orange-to-yellow gradient sans-serif font below it.

introvert insights

Illumination and Inspiration for Introverts

April 2018

Acting Out of Character Is a Worthy Cause—As Is Reclaiming Yourself

Wouldn't it be nice if you could go through life playing entirely to your introverted preferences?

Well, you can't. I can't either. None of us can.

We introverts can't expect the world to start magically catering solely to us, for starters. Much more importantly, though, we often pull out our extravert skills intentionally, in the name of a good cause. Knowing full well that we will likely pay an energy price for our actions, we sometimes go forth as temporary extraverts anyway—on purpose, for a purpose.

In his fascinating book *Me, Myself, and Us: The Science of Personality and the Art of Well-Being* (PublicAffairs, 2016), psychologist and lecturer Brian Little—himself a strong introvert—offers a name for this phenomenon, which he himself engages in every time he stands in front of an audience to lecture.

He calls it *acting out of character*.

A “Flaming Extravert”?

Little—quite the character himself judging by both his experiences and his refreshingly humorous writ-

ing style—says that, like many other introverts, he has much of the world convinced he's an extravert.

All it takes to be fooled, he says, is watching him present. As he recalls about a talk he once gave:

When I stepped up to the platform to deliver the keynote address ..., a familiar “click” occurred. I switched from my natural (biologically) introverted personality to something very different. At 8:35 in the morning, audiences do not really want to hear modulated, soft-spoken, tentative introvert-speak, especially after a long bout of impassioned drinking the night before. ... So, as a member of the audience, if you were asked a few minutes into my presentation what Professor Little is like, you probably would have said he is a flaming extravert.

Not so. He was intentionally *acting out of character*, a term that must be understood in not just one but two contexts, he stresses.

The first is the one we typically

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THE INTROVERT LIFE

WORK SAVVY

“Holding Emails” Keep People Informed—and Buy You Time

One of the upsides of email is its speed: You click “send” and the recipient has your message seconds or, at most, minutes later.

Oops—that’s one of email’s hidden downsides, too, at least where many introverts are concerned. For it tends to produce in the sender the expectation of an equally instant or near-instant response.

Alas, we introverts would rather take our time with such things. We usually choose our words carefully, for starters, whether we’re talking or writing. We want to be thorough in our communications, too. And to



top things off, if we’re in the middle of something, we don’t want to break our focus and concentration, especially when it has taken us a while to get into “The Zone” in the first place.

What to do? Well, master the art of the simple but effective *holding email*—a quick (in terms of both time and length) response to someone’s email that simply tells them that a)

you’ve received it, b) you’ve read it, and c) you have a plan and a timeline for fully responding to it.

It can be as simple as something like this:

Hi <Name>,

Just wanted you to know that I got your email. I’ll send you a more detailed response to it by the end of the day tomorrow.

<Your Name>

Bonus benefit: Holding emails serve as nagging-prevention devices: Say goodbye to “Did you get my email?” emails.

SHOPPING STRATEGIES

Browse in Peace: Take Charge So the Salesperson Doesn’t

As my wife and I pulled into the parking lot, we took a deep breath, looked at each other, and nodded to signal that we were ready.

We were going in.

Not into a war zone or a crime scene or even a party at our least-favorite relative’s house but, rather, the furniture store.

On a whim, we had decided to look for a new mattress for our bed. We just felt like browsing for a few minutes; nothing more. But we knew what we’d be up against: an overly zealous salesperson, descending upon us the moment we walked through the front door.

That’s how it always goes at this particular store. When you leave

your car and head for the entrance, a sophisticated tracking system locks onto your position and signals the people inside—who are hovering in front of radar screens—that you are on your way in.

Before the door even closes behind you, someone is closing on you, speaking exclamation point.

“Hello!” they say. “I’m [Name]! How can I help you today?!”

My wife and I, both introverts, don’t have the cold souls to say what we really want to say: “You can help us by going away.” We also know that the salespeople are just trying to do their jobs, and that they often **are**, in fact, helpful in the end.

But sometimes we really do just want to look around. In peace. So we’ve come up with a simple two-

step strategy we use to keep the peace, at this store and similar establishments, while still being kind and respectful:

Step 1: We say to the salesperson, “We’re just looking around for now,” and then—immediately—we follow up with

Step 2: “We’ll come find you when we have questions.”

It works, but it’s all in the execution. Step 1 alone, you see, doesn’t work without Step 2. In fact, Step 1 on its own merely compels the salesperson to continue leading you around asking, “What are you looking for today?”

To which we always want to respond: “If we knew, we wouldn’t be browsing.”

RESEARCH YOU CAN USE

“Ready-to-Resume” Plans Can Mitigate Interruptions

When you’re an introvert, there’s nothing more frustrating—especially at work—than getting interrupted as you’re trying to focus on a task.

A new University of Washington study, to be published in an upcoming issue of *Organization Science*, offers an effective way to cope.

By taking a minute to jot down a *ready-to-resume plan* for the task you were initially working on—a note or two on where you left off and what you need to do to get started again—you avoid the “attention residue” that would otherwise hamper you as you move on to the new task, says study co-author Sophie Leroy, an assistant professor of business at Washington.

Leroy and colleague Theresa Glomb, a business professor at the



University of Minnesota, conducted four studies in which subjects were set to work on a task with a time constraint and were then interrupted to work on a different project.

Participants who made ready-to-resume plans did better on the task they moved on to, the studies found.

“We have to proactively manage the way we transition between tasks

to help our attention be more focused and less distracted or divided among everything we have on our plate,” says Leroy.

The researchers now plan to study whether ready-to-resume plans improve people’s performance when they return to their initial task.

Source: University of Washington news release, January 16, 2018.

REFLECTIVE READS

Funny How It Turns Out: We Introverts Aren’t Really Alone

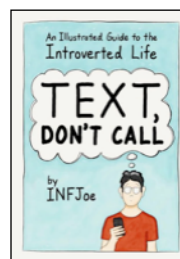
“Should You Call Me?” asks a deadily accurate flowchart in Maureen “Marzi” Wilson’s clever book, *Introvert Doodles*.

The chart meanders through various real-life scenarios but ultimately leads to only two possible courses of action:

“Call 911” or “Don’t Call Me!”

Similarly, in *Text, Don’t Call*, Aaron Caycedo-Kimura (who goes by the pen name INFJoe) draws up a refreshingly realistic rendition of the introvert’s dream cubicle at work.

It has a top. And no door.



Sometimes we introverts need to laugh about ourselves without laughing at ourselves. Wilson and Caycedo-Kimura will give you the chance to do just that, all in a spirit of affirmation that makes it seem as though they’ve been in your introverted head, gathering comedic ma-

terial from the files there.

In fact, Wilson and Caycedo-Kimura—who don’t know each other, as far as I’m aware—seem to have learned the exact same critical lesson through the process of drawing their introvert-friendly cartoons and sharing them with the world over the last few years.

“It’s been empowering to realize that, although we [introverts] often spend time alone,” Wilson writes, “we aren’t alone after all.”

“Although you prefer solitude much of the time,” Caycedo-Kimura adds, “you’re not alone; we introverts are **alone together**.”

There's No Such Thing as an Introvert—Because Introversion Presents Itself in Different Ways

In medical and psychological circles, you often hear about how a certain condition “presents” itself. The flu, for example, frequently presents as achiness, a fever, nausea, significant fatigue. Depression presents as an extended period of sadness, irritability, weight loss or weight gain, changes in appetite.

But the flu doesn't look exactly the same in everyone. Nor does depression. Nor does any other illness. These conditions present differently in different people because, well, people are different from each other—and they live in different circumstances, facing a different set of daily variables.

The flu and depression, of course, are just two common examples of ailments—conditions we diagnose and then try to fix. Introversion is **not** an ailment; let me be clear about that. You don't diagnose it, and you surely don't fix it!

But the more I study it and, especially, the more I live it—in my own life and through the lives of the people immediately around me—the more I realize that introversion presents differently in different people too. There really is no such thing as an introvert.

I don't even have to leave my own house to be reminded of it.

Differing Priorities

When I wrote my book *The Introvert Manifesto*, I came up with a concept called “The Four Pillars of Introvert Well-Being” to describe the four essential needs of introverts in everyday life: Solitude, Reflection, Focus, and Depth. If you consistently address these needs, the thinking goes, you will feel and perform your



best. And if you're not feeling and performing your best, the thinking also goes, look to these four areas for your fix, literally and figuratively. They're the pillars holding up the “roof” that is your well-being as an introvert. If one of them is buckling, the whole structure could collapse.

I stand by this statement, and this concept. But I'm becoming increasingly aware of something: Different introverts prioritize these pillars differently with respect to importance and impact on their lives.

Me? I'm a Solitude kind of guy, first and foremost. I need my quiet alone time above all else. If I get to have only one of the Four Pillars at any given time, I'll pick Solitude. Reflection (the chance to think, especially before I speak) comes in a very close second, followed by Focus (being able to do one thing at a time instead of 12) and finally Depth (being able to build deep relationships, for example, or have deep conversations, or study something in depth).

(Perhaps it's not coincidental, by the way, that I list the Four Pillars in this batting order in my own model. How convenient!)

My lovely wife Adrienne, on the other hand, who is also an introvert, has told me from the moment she met me—and read a first draft of the

manuscript for *The Introvert Manifesto* five years ago now—that Reflection is her top need as an introvert.

“I always thought there was something wrong with me for not talking during staff meetings and needing extra time to process things,” Adrienne wrote in one of her comments on my manuscript.

“I won't speak up at meetings, but I do have lots to say! I just need time to hear others' thoughts and opinions before formulating my own.”

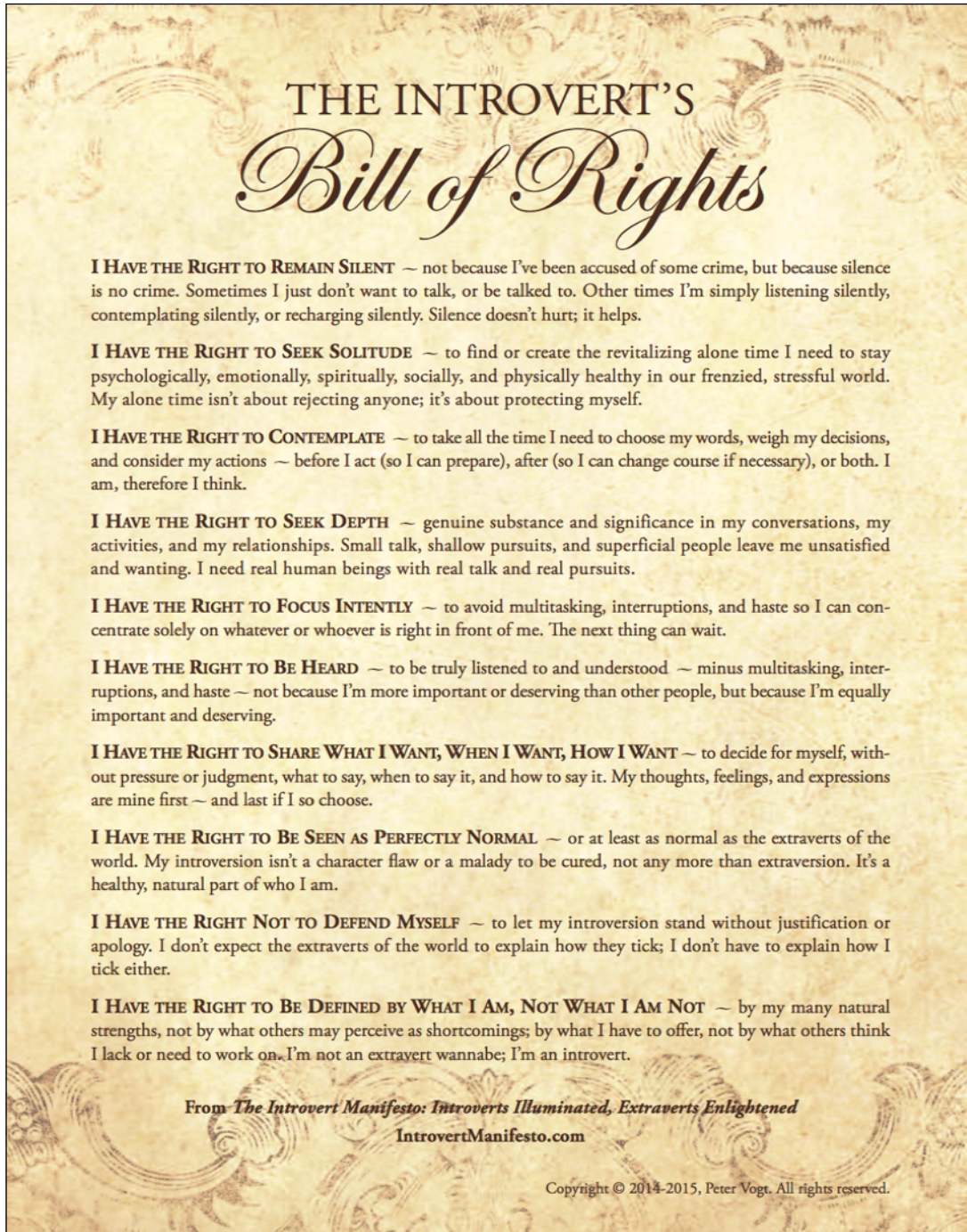
Adrienne does cherish her Solitude, particularly on early weekday mornings as she prepares to go to school to teach her kindergarteners. But if she had to choose her defining characteristic as an introvert, she'd choose Reflection. She presents, you might say, as a reflection-oriented introvert.

Adrienne frequently needs to remind me that the first words out of her mouth are sometimes merely a first draft—not exactly what she'd ultimately like to express, or how, particularly if she's having to speak off the cuff. It simply doesn't work for her to be put on the spot. She **can** do it. Everyone has to from time to time, after all. But, given the choice, she'll want to think—carefully—first, then speak. Process. Process. Process. Talk. She'll live without the other pillars for a while, as long as she gets her Reflection time.

I need to remember all of this, being someone who presents as a solitude-oriented introvert. Adrienne and I are very closely aligned in terms of both our personalities and our ways of thinking and being. But we are not exactly the same.

No two introverts are.

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associate with the phrase: acting away from or differently than what's normally expected of us. Acting, almost literally.

The second context of *acting out of character*, on the other hand, means "acting because of," Little says, as in: "She did it out of compassion."

"So when I use the phrase '*acting out of character*,'" Little writes, "it means two different but equally powerful ways of explaining a pattern of behavior. It simultaneously means people are acting inconsistently with what we have come to expect *and* that they are doing it because of something in their character, because of the *values* they wish to express."

And just what might those values

be? In other words, why would you, as an introvert, knowingly and intentionally engage in extraverted types of behavior? There are two primary reasons, Little argues: love and professionalism.

Love—Perhaps you go to a party with your extraverted spouse and interact with the people there because such a gesture makes your beloved feel cherished.

Professionalism—You don't mind getting on the phone and calling total strangers if it means raising money for the nonprofit agency you've worked so hard to build over the years.

Recoup the Costs

But what about that price you expected to pay for your extraverted actions? It's real, particularly if your "temporary" extraversion turns out

to be less temporary than you first anticipated. As Little puts it:

*I believe that **protractedly** acting out of character ... can extract both psychological and physical costs.*

Which means, he says, that as an introvert, it's critical for you to find one or more *restorative niches*—places or activities that help you reclaim your more natural, introverted "first nature" after a time of extraverting.

Sadly, though, this is the part of the equation that we introverts too frequently overlook or ignore, thinking it doesn't really matter—not **really** really.

But it does. After all, you're probably extraverting for a good cause to begin with, whatever it may be. Don't forget that you're recharging for a good cause, too.

You.



Editor and Publisher:
Peter Vogt, M.S.
peter@introvertinsights.com



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INTROVERT INSPIRATIONS

"I don't think I'm in any danger of running off into the hills for years and being on my own. But I do relate to that impulse—that when I need to sort things out with myself and I need to refresh myself, I need to take space."

~ Sean Tucker

"To my fellow introverts, let's understand ourselves. All we ever need to be is enough of who we are because we are enough as we are."

~ Soumya John

"Allow yourself to slow down and use your time effectively."

~ Ann Brown

"You have to find your own path to maximize your energy."

~ James Altucher

"This year, I resolve to remember that the only evaluation that matters is a self-evaluation, and that maintaining a peaceful, safe bubble for myself amidst all the noise of culture and social media is an achievement in and of itself."

~ Brian Gresko