



i **n** introvert insights

“Acting Extraverted” Will Indeed Help You—When It’s *Meaningful*

By Peter Vogt

The other day, my wife Adrienne and I, along with two of our kids, took a Sunday stroll at a nearby park, basking in the unseasonably warm temperatures and savoring the grass and trees surrounding us.

We were practically alone at the place, save for the presumably married couple we said hello to early on as we passed them on the sidewalk.

Near the end of our walk, though, we ran into this same couple again. And out of the blue, they stopped us.

“It’s so nice to see a family out walking together. You hardly ever see that anymore,” the wife said to us, as she literally patted me on the shoulder. “Good for all of you.”

It was an energizing interaction. Strong introvert that I am, I hadn’t sought it out. But I gladly rode the extraverting wave when it came; it made me feel good.

A few days prior, though, I’d had a similar experience that had produced the opposite result.

I was standing in line at Walmart when the older man behind me caught my eye, smiled, and said,

“You’re a tall one.”

I am a tall one; 6-foot-4. But I already knew this. So I simply nodded “thanks,” hoping the discussion would soon be over.

It was, and afterward I felt bad because it wouldn’t have killed me to talk to the guy a little more. But for me, **this** type of extraverted interaction is off-putting. It seems pointless. And it’s draining.

Let’s summarize, then:

At the park, I acted extraverted and wound up feeling better. At Wally World, I acted introverted and felt worse.

These results would seem to line up with the key finding of a recent study in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*: Acting extraverted boosts your well-being; acting introverted worsens it.

But that’s not the whole story.

A Reasonable Assumption

During my first two years as an undergraduate in college, I was a mathematics major. I enjoyed math when numbers were involved. But

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TIPS, TRICKS, AND TOOLS

DOING YOUR BEST WORK

Review Other People's Work on Your Terms—by Yourself

A colleague stops by your desk at work and asks you for feedback on a project proposal he's written.

The graphic designer who's been helping you create marketing materials for your small business drops by unannounced to get your input on some initial brochure layouts.

Your 15-year-old daughter comes to see you as you're drinking tea at the kitchen table and asks you to look at the final draft of the essay she's been working on for her European History class.

You're willing and able to help in each case, but there's a problem—one that only you recognize: In each scenario, the person who came to see you is now just standing there, lurking, waiting patiently (or perhaps not so patiently) for you to respond, right then and there in the moment.

You don't have to.

If you're an introvert especially, you'd likely prefer to review the proposal/look at the layouts/read the essay by yourself, minus the other person's watchful eyes and, in many



cases, his/her running commentary as you're trying to focus on the important job at hand.

Go ahead and simply ask for what you need. But phrase your request in the context of effectively meeting the **other** person's needs, not yours. For example:

I'll be able to give you my best feedback if I can work on this alone. I'll do it _____ (right away/within the hour/by tomorrow morning) and come find you when I'm done.

Reviewing other people's work on your own terms benefits you and the other person alike, in several ways:

1) You probably aren't your best immediately after being interrupted anyway; it's much more likely that you're a bit unsettled.

2) You're much better when you can concentrate and get yourself into "the zone" of deep focus.

3) You're far less likely to be a yes man/woman—letting errors and weak points slide on through your evaluation—when the person whose work you're looking at isn't physically in your presence ... staring at you.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Emailing an Extravert? Keep It Short to Keep It Effective

When it comes to communication, especially at work, email is many an introvert's best friend. It's usually far easier to write down your thoughts and feelings about something than to speak them.

But sometimes that can make for

a pretty long email—and if the recipient of that email is an extravert, you may lose him/her, according to Liz Fosslien and Mollie West Duffy, co-authors of the recently published book *No Hard Feelings: The Secret Power of Embracing Emotions at Work*.

"Extraverts, who often prefer to discuss issues or ideas in person, might skim through only the first

paragraphs" of an email, Fosslien and West Duffy write in the book.

So you're better off meeting your extraverted colleagues in the middle and keeping your emails to them brief: perhaps a few sentences along with some bullet points.

You'll then have a solid starting point for the in-person discussion(s) that will surely follow.

Start Seeing Your “Personal Brand” as How You Serve

What’s your first reaction when you hear you should be building your *personal brand* via social media and other promotional outlets?

If your gag reflex is involved, you’re far from alone.

“Much of the conventional wisdom about using social media as a professional tool revolves around promoting your particular skills and expertise as a coherent, distinctive package,” writes technology researcher Alexandra Samuel in her recent *Wall Street Journal* article, “A Social Media Guide for Introverts.”

But if you’re an introvert, Samuel says, you don’t have to think of your social media presence as *branding*. “After all,” she stresses, “you’re a person, not a product.”

Instead, “think of it as providing an actual service to all the people who can benefit from your curation and insight,” says Samuel, who is also author of the 2015 book *Work Smarter with Social Media*.

“That will take away the pressure to see social networks as a stage where you have to perform.”

Marketing expert Marcia Yudkin, an introvert herself who offers an online course called “Personal Branding for Introverts,” says she sees “a complete switch in attitude” in her introverted clients when they see marketing as “something benefiting those being marketed to, or indeed the world at large.”

“[I]s there a way of thinking about what you do as much larger than little ol’ you?” she asks in her

website article “Selling Selflessly May Be the Key for Introverts.”

For example, she notes, if you write résumés for people, you help them find jobs, which in turn eases the stress on them and their families.

Similarly, she says, if you teach yoga, “you bring greater physical vibrancy and spiritual peace to those in your classes.”

In other words, Yudkin says, the spotlight isn’t on you; it’s on the people you help.

You’re simply the knowledgeable guide on the side.



PARENTING

You Deserve to Be Alone in Your Own Home Sometimes

Writer Kitty Black was once asked what she wished she’d known before having children.

“I wish I knew they would be on me for two years,” she replied.

Yes, children are wonderful. But they can be smothering, too, albeit not on purpose (usually).

So sometimes, Black says, you need to get away from them, especially if you’re an introvert.

Actually, she says, it’s more accu-

rate to say that sometimes, your children need to get away from you—as in **they** need to get out of the house, so that you can be alone **at home**.

“Make other people leave the house,” Black writes in her recent *Motherly* article “Parenting as an Introvert: What You Need to Know.”

For example: If you hire a babysitter, Black says, make sure that sometimes, the babysitter takes your kids out. Or simply drop your kids off **at** the babysitter’s house.

“Time alone to potter around an empty house and make your own

decisions is vital,” Black concludes.

“If you can hear other people, then you’ll remain invested in them rather than yourself, which completely negates alone time!”



IT'S AN INTROVERT'S LIFE

You Don't Have to Use Your Mouth to Express Yourself Well

By Peter Vogt

One day when I was about 8, my dad ripped the aging, ragtag cupboards out of our kitchen and started building the new, matching set my mom had wanted for so long.

Over the course of a few weeks, we watched as Dad's handmade, stained-brown creations slowly came to life. By the time he was done, Mom had a spacious cupboard to the left of the sink, one to the right of it, another near the stove, and one in the corner, along with a smaller mini-cupboard right above the sink (not to mention three additional cupboards at floor level).

They were perfect.

But then we noticed something.

Dad was 6-feet-4-inches tall. So when he'd installed the upper cupboards, he'd quite naturally put them

at what, to him, was a normal height. He could reach the handles—and the top shelves within—easily.

Mom, on the other hand, was 5-foot-7. So when she came along to test out the new cupboards, she discovered that they were—well, they weren't exactly at eye level; not hers, anyway. She couldn't reach for the handles and shelves. She had to reach **up** to them.

Her reaction?

She loved her cupboards.

They were still perfect.

Their height made no difference to her. She just adapted. (In her later years she took to "reaching" cereal boxes on the top shelf by stabbing them with a 12-inch carving fork and pulling them down to her outreached hand.) She loved her cupboards—and they were definitely her cupboards, not ours—not because they



really were perfect, but because they were perfect to her. And because they were the perfect way for my quiet dad to express his love for her.

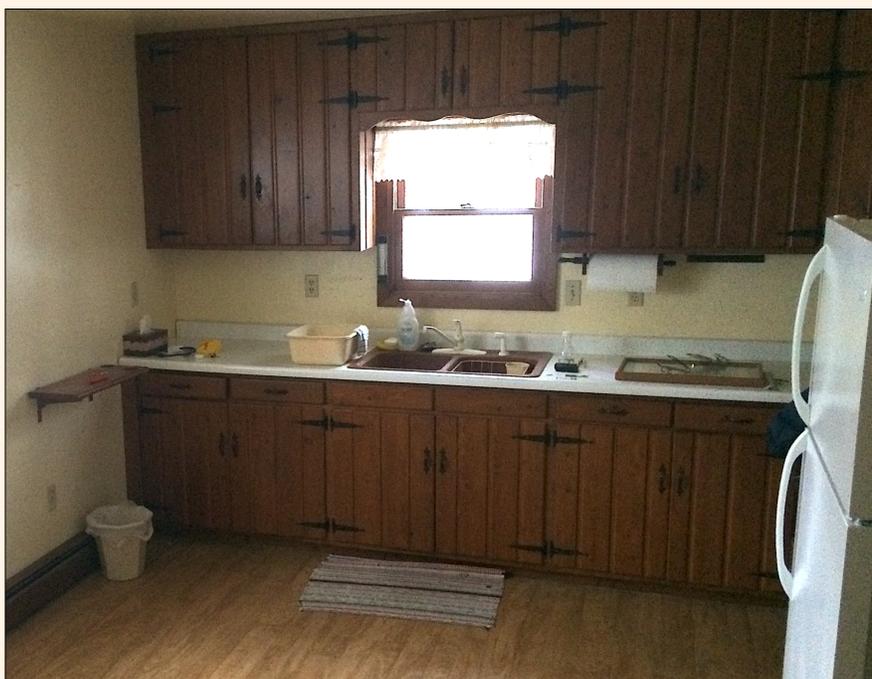
Dad operated like this his whole life. He wasn't the verbal "I love you, Nancy" type; he was the "I'll show you I love you, Nancy" type—which meant that our house was filled with the things he had made for her: our kitchen table, our living room coffee table, the side table by his living room chair and the matching one by Mom's, and his masterpiece: the "swinging bed"—an old mattress on a bedspring that hung from chains in our back-porch ceiling and rocked you to sleep during a summer rain.

My dad, like so many other introverts, expressed himself best in a way that didn't involve his mouth.

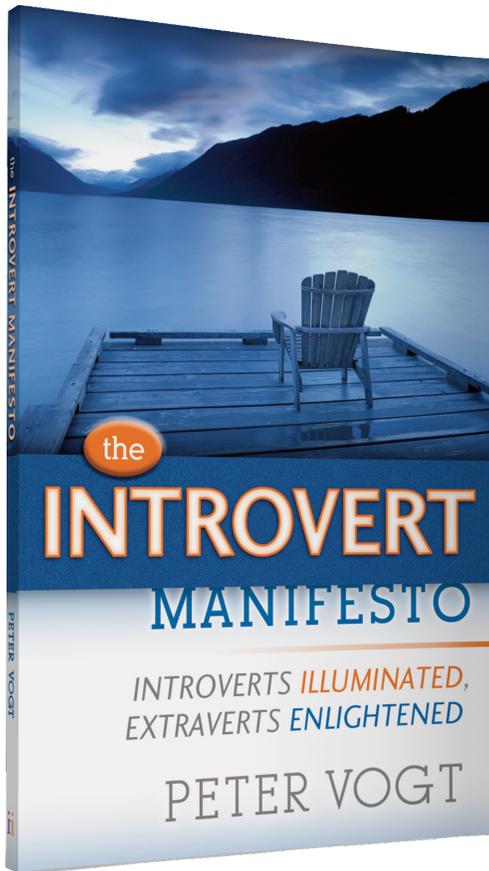
Maybe you're the same. Maybe you, like my dad, gravitate toward building things. Maybe you're into painting portraits or shooting photographs or playing music or writing essays or landscaping your yard.

Go ahead. Express yourself in a way that works for **you**.

It'll be perfect.



Introverts. Explained. Accurately.



“The Introvert Manifesto is the manual [on introverts] that should have come in the box.”

Nancy Ancowitz, author of *Self-Promotion for Introverts* and producer of the “Self-Promotion for Introverts” blog for *Psychology Today*

Read extensive excerpts and order your paperback copy now at:

IntrovertManifesto.com

PRACTICAL RESEARCH

For Some, Too *Little Solitude* Is as Harmful as Too Much

While past research has shown that too much solitude can hurt us in various ways, a recent series of four studies suggests that too little solitude can hurt us too—some of us, at least, since “us” is made up of different types of people with different solitude needs and preferences.

The investigators in the study series, led by Robert Coplan of Carleton University in Ontario, introduced and then tested a new psychological construct they call *aloneliness*, which they define as “the negative feelings that may arise from the perception that one is not getting to spend **enough** time alone.”

“Being alone is still most often portrayed as an undesirable state

with negative implications for well-being,” Coplan and his colleagues write in their recent *Personality and Individual Differences* article summarizing the four studies.

But Coplan et al. found that “this assumed linear relation may be more complex and nuanced” than we’ve been led to believe.

Specifically, the researchers say, increased solitude may have different—i.e., positive—implications for people who are intrinsically motivated to pursue solitude in the first place.

The results from the studies “suggest that we should also consider the implications of **too little** solitude for our well-being and mental health,” Coplan and his colleagues note.

And what might those implications be? One of them involves the

potential psychological price paid by people who treasure their time alone but can’t get it (or enough of it, at least).

“[Our] findings are among the first to suggest an explanatory mechanism as to why those with strong preferences for solitude might be at risk for adjustment difficulties,” Coplan et al. conclude.

“It may be that individuals with stronger preferences for solitude might benefit from either more deliberate planning so that their needs for solitude are satisfied **or** by re-adjusting their expectations for time alone.”

Source: “Seeking More Solitude: Conceptualization, Assessment, and Implications of Aloneliness,” *Personality and Individual Differences*, 148(1) (October 2019), pp. 17-26.

REFLECTIVE READS

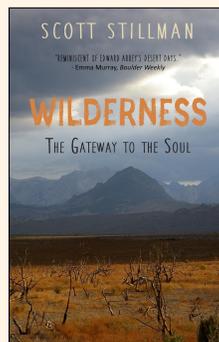
Wilderness: The Only Place Left to Find Genuine Quiet

In *Wilderness: The Gateway to the Soul*, author Scott Stillman asks a question you’ll surely relate to as an introvert:

Where can you go anymore to find quiet—real quiet, the kind of quiet that, as Stillman puts it, “cleanses the mind” and silences the “maddening chatter in your head”?

There’s only one place left, Stillman argues: the wilderness.

The typical modern campground, with its satellite TV hookups and its gas-powered generators, doesn’t cut it, Stillman stresses. If you want to



Control-Alt-Delete yourself, you need to go into the deep wilderness, miles off-trail, where “blissful solitude will be guaranteed.”

In *Wilderness*, Stillman takes us along on many of his own wilderness excursions, most of them solos in the western United States. His ob-

servations are exquisitely detailed, celebratory even—which means that as you’re reading the book, you’re essentially **on** the various wilderness trips with Stillman, taking in the sights, sounds, and smells through his written observations.

Stillman’s core argument is that we must preserve our wilderness lands to maintain our collective access to true silence—the type of silence we require (especially if we’re introverts) to make sense of life.

“As our world becomes increasingly polluted with noise,” Stillman concludes, “silence is becoming our rarest commodity.” But we need it, he says, more than ever.

Continued from page 1

then numbers gave way to letters and Greek symbols, which in turn led to us completing complex mathematical proofs.

Eventually, a mathematics concept called the *axiom* drove me a) quietly insane, and therefore b) in another academic direction.

The website Wikibooks offers a definition of *axiom* that is shockingly candid and accurate:

*An axiom is something that is assumed or believed to be true. It is where mathematical proof starts; you cannot **prove** the axioms, you merely **believe them** [emphasis mine] and use them to prove other things.*

Arrrggghhh!

Sorry. But as you can perhaps understand, I questioned (and still do) using an **assumption** to “**prove**” anything at all.

But axioms still have a defensible place in our regular daily lives, outside of math at any rate. That’s why I got to thinking about them as I read the recent *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* study, “Experimental Manipulation of Extraverted and Introverted Behavior and Its Effects on Well-Being.”

The study rests, broadly speaking, on an axiom we’ve all heard many times: That we humans are social animals.

We are. I absolutely accept this premise—I do assume or believe it to be true—and I think most people, introverts and extraverts alike, would agree.

But don’t we, as individual humans, prefer to be social—to “act extraverted”—in different **ways**?

More to the point in the context of the study: Don’t we introverts in particular see “acting extraverted”

not as a binary concept (i.e., you’re either “acting extraverted” or you’re not) but, rather, as an activity that comes in different **forms**—some well worth the cost in energy, others not so much; some mood-enhancing, others irritating ... or worse?

This question and others like it are crucial to consider, as the study’s authors—to their credit—acknowledge themselves.

A Boost to Well-Being

In the study, researchers Seth Margolis and Sonja Lyubomirsky of the University of California-Riverside asked 131 undergraduates to “act extraverted” for one week and to “act introverted” for another.

Margolis and Lyubomirsky didn’t use the terms *extraverted* and *introverted*, however. Instead, they told participants to be “talkative,” “assertive,” and “spontaneous” (for extraverted) and “deliberate,” “quiet,” and “reserved” (for introverted).

The students completed surveys throughout the experience, along with assessments of personality, happiness, life satisfaction, extraverted behavior, and extraversion desire.

“Did changes in extraverted behavior coincide with changes in well-being?” Margolis and Lyubomirsky ask in the article.

“Participants reported marked growth in positive affect during the extraversion week and marked decline in positive affect during the introversion week,” the researchers note in answering their own question.

They go on, though, to point out several nuances in their findings.

They note that “unsurprisingly, people who found acting extraverted to feel relatively more natural, enjoyable, and meaningful than acting introverted experienced larger boosts in well-being after acting extraverted (vs. acting introverted).”

Similarly, the researchers write that “people who had a stronger desire to become more extraverted may have been impacted more by the interventions because they value extraversion more and likely mustered more effort into acting extraverted.”

Margolis and Lyubomirsky then go on to raise a key question: “Which specific behaviors led to changes in well-being?”

“Unfortunately,” they say, “we do not know the particular behaviors that participants enacted and their unique effects.”

That information is critical—because as I’ve known for years and as I’ve reconfirmed in my own life in recent days: Not all “acting extraverted” activities are created equal.

Meaning matters. Meaning is everything.

The Introvert’s Way

Last week, I spent several hours with my wife’s grandmother Lorna as we watched my son (her great-grandson) play in a high school soccer game.

Lorna subscribes to *Introvert Insights* and, as I came to find out, she sees herself as having a strong introverted side to her personality.

I don’t know Lorna particularly well, and vice versa, but we ended up having a great time together, eventually having an extended discussion about introversion and how it plays out in people’s lives.

At one point, Lorna turned to me and said, “We haven’t spent much time with each other, but we’re getting along like old friends.”

And we were.

Why?

Because we were “acting extraverted” the introvert’s way: with purpose. Our interaction wasn’t superficial; it was deep and **meaningful**.

And that, to paraphrase Robert Frost, makes all the difference.



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INTROVERT INSPIRATIONS

“[S]tanding out doesn't mean diverging from your true self. ... There is power in silence, and an introvert's quiet strength is what makes you stand out in the end.”

~ Macy Alcaraz

“In the age of overstimulation, there is much to be said for the ability to focus, work autonomously, spend time alone, and nurture independent thinking.”

~ Ana Andjelic

“[I]n an age of constant movement, nothing is more urgent than sitting still.”

~ Pico Iyer

“Introverts should be encouraged to be more of who we are, never less. ... True success and joy in life come from a foundation that honors being more of who you are truly meant to be and less of who you are not.”

~ Lisa Petrilli