



introvert insights

Act Extraverted When You Need to, but *Be* the Introvert You Are

By Peter Vogt

My older brother Mark has always told me he has the ability to flip a metaphorical switch inside himself so he can become a sort of extravert-on-demand.

“It’s like what happens to performers just as they put on their costume to play ‘superstar’ on stage,” he says. “The costume has a magical effect, like you’ve been granted superpowers.”

Mark is a fine actor, it turns out, so convincing that I’m sure many of the people in his life think he really is an extravert. But he isn’t. He’s more of an ambivert, near the middle of the introvert-extravert spectrum though likely leaning a bit closer to the introverted side.

If he needs to jump into the proverbial phone booth and become Super Extravert for his job as an IT consultant, or for his role as son-/brother-in-law in his wife Judith’s extended Cameroonian family, he just does it. And he does it well.

Mark’s method is commonplace among introverts. You likely have

your own version(s) of it. I sure do.

But is it healthy? Is it good for you? Is it normal?

Yes—as long as you’re temporarily modifying your **behavior** for a purpose that matters to you. And as long as you’re not trying to permanently change your very **self**.

“Acting Out of Character”

In his fascinating 2016 book *Me, Myself, and Us: The Science of Personality and the Art of Well-Being*, psychologist Brian Little, himself a strong introvert, introduces the concept of *acting out of character*.

It’s what Mark and the rest of us introverts are doing when we take on the role of extravert: We are, quite literally, acting—and the “out of character” aspect of Little’s phrase means, in this context, that we are merely behaving differently than we typically do.

But “acting out of character” can be viewed through another contextual lens too, Little says: The words “out of” also connote acting **because of**, as in the phrase “she acted out of

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TIPS, TRICKS, AND TOOLS

SOCIAL LIFE

Leave Social Events Before Your Battery Is 100% Drained

Instead of burning through every ounce of her energy at social gatherings—and then paying dearly for it the next day—writer Shristi Sargent leaves events when she’s just “70 percent done,” she writes in her recent *IntrovertDear.com* article “Science Explains Why I Have a Love-Hate Relationship with Parties.”

“I used to try to stay and socialize for as long as possible so I could squeeze in as much ‘fun’ as possible in one night. Then I’d go home ready to crash on my bed, and my mental depletion would spill over into the next day,” writes Sargent, who in her *IntrovertDear.com* bio describes herself as “an awkwardly shy and anxious person who often gets mistaken for an extrovert.”

Sargent decided to change her approach to socializing after she stumbled upon a fascinating 2017 study published in the *Journal of Personality*.

In it, researchers Sointu Leikas and Ville-Juhani Ilmarinen of the



University of Helsinki found that extraverted behavior, such as going out with friends, boosts mood and reduces fatigue in the immediate moment, for extraverts and introverts alike.

But three hours later it results in greater fatigue—again, for extraverts and introverts alike.

“The University of Helsinki study helped me see that extraverted behavior can create happiness initially, but can transition to fatigue and a

sense of depletion just a few hours later,” Sargent says.

So “[n]owadays,” she stresses, “I prepare for my upcoming energy depletion by leaving social settings when I feel 70 percent done. ... Then it’s time to leave, even if I’ve only been there for 30 minutes.”

(The *Journal of Personality* article is entitled “Happy Now, Tired Later? Extraverted and Conscientious Behavior Are Related to Immediate Mood Gains, but to Later Fatigue.”)

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Just Tell People: “I’ll Have a Good Answer for You—Later”

As an introvert, you’re probably quite familiar with—and frustrated by—the difficulty you sometimes have replying to questions immediately, right in the moment.

The perfect response to a job interview question arrives, tardy, two minutes after the interview is over, when you’re riding down the eleva-

tor on your way out of the building. The answer to the question your boss posed during a meeting at work doesn’t show up until you’re driving home, or lying in bed that night.

Psychologist Marti Olsen Laney has been there, and she has a solution for you—one that, ironically, she once offered on the fly to one of her therapy clients.

“[R]emember,” I said, “you can always say ‘I’ll have a good answer

for you on my way home in the car, but nothing is coming to me now,’” she writes in *The Introvert Advantage*, her bestselling book.

The combination of humor and honesty shows the questioner that you know yourself, and that you’re thoughtful in your approach to handling tricky questions.

It also buys you time to formulate, and then share, the intelligent response you know you have in you.

Busy Work Environment Calls for an Oasis in Your Home

The busier your workplace or workspace as an introvert, the more you need to create a peaceful get-away somewhere in your home, according to interior designer Rachel Cannon, an introvert herself who was recently interviewed for an article on design website Lonny.com.

In “Why Introverts Should Have Different Homes Than Extroverts,” Cannon notes that open-floor plans in particular will likely take a toll on you. And not only at work.

“The cacophony that an open floor plan [in your home] creates—between kitchen noises, television noises, device noises, plus just the regular conversation between people—can be a major irritant for us [introverts],” Cannon says.

That’s why “every home,” she says, “should have a quiet room where people like me can retreat to process our day, recharge our internal batteries, and recover from the toll of functioning in a world that’s

designed for extraverts to succeed.”

Cannon acknowledges that it may not be practical for you to set aside a **large** space or a **dedicated** space for your introvert oasis.

No matter.

“You don’t have to build an addition to your home or build a she-shed in your backyard to have a quiet room,” she says.

“Look for low-traffic areas in your house where you can build your nest of solitude. Maybe you have a guest room or an office that doesn’t get much use. Maybe there’s an extra closet you could clean out.

“Once you start looking, you’ll probably find a small area in your home that you can carve out for yourself.”



HEALTHY HABITS

“Implementation Intention”: A Pathway to Healthy Eating

It’s one thing to tell yourself that you won’t eat any junk food today. It’s quite another to follow through on that commitment if, for example, one of your colleagues brings a box of donuts to work.

What to do? If you’re an introvert and you’re trying to beat unhealthy eating habits, tap into your natural preferences for researching, thinking, and planning, says writer Scott Christ, an introvert himself and

founder of Rochester, Michigan-based Pure Food Company.

“Introverts are masters at processing, digesting, and analyzing data. But many don’t use this skill to their advantage,” writes Christ in his recent LifeHack.org website article “The Introvert’s Guide to Getting in Shape.”

One of the smartest things you can do as an introvert when you’re trying to avoid the donuts etc. is to plan for the worst, Christ says.

“In the world of psychology, this is called an *implementation intention*,”

he says. If you know you’re going to be in a situation where you’ll be tempted to eat the wrong thing, take time beforehand to write down—and perhaps even state—your back-up plan.

You can use the basic framework: “When I encounter __, I will __.” For example: “When someone offers me pizza, I’ll politely decline.”

“Implementation intentions are effective for introverts,” Christ stresses, “because they give clear instructions on what to do when your willpower muscle goes limp.”

IT'S AN INTROVERT'S LIFE

Yes, Do Good Things for Others; but Do Good Things for *You*, Too

By Peter Vogt

When a friend of mine ordered my book *The Introvert Manifesto* the other day, she asked me to write a specific message inside of it:

*To my dear closeted introverted friend [Name]: It's OK to take time in the closet to recharge.
Sincerely, Peter.*

I couldn't tell how she was really feeling when she sent this request. Was she just asking for a friendly reminder she could turn to on a difficult day sometime in the future? Was she in crisis now and in effect calling out for help? Was it both? Somewhere in between?

My friend drifted back into my mind the other night as my wife Adrienne and I sat by the fireplace of the Jon L. Wanzek Center for Scouting in Fargo, North Dakota, where we were waiting outside a conference room to see if our son Isaac would become an Eagle Scout. (He did.)

As I sat there wishing the fireplace was actually lit during one of the coldest evenings of the winter, I looked up and saw a banner hanging from the ceiling. On it were the words of the Boy Scout slogan: "Do a Good Turn Daily."

I've always loved this simple axiom, along with the simple way the Scouts view it: as "a special act of kindness," big or, more often, small.

The slogan implies, not unrea-

sonably, that you should do a good turn daily for someone else. But when my friend came back to mind, I couldn't help wondering: How come we don't think about doing a good turn daily for **ourselves**?

Well, we should. Not instead of doing a nice thing for someone else, but in addition to it.

If you're an introvert and you want to feel good and stay healthy—physically, psychologically, emotionally, spiritually—make a point of doing one little thing each day to take care of yourself. Among the many introvert-friendly possibilities:

Take a quick walk. If you have breaks or a lunch period at work, for instance, use 10 minutes of it to take a short walk, preferably outside. If you can sneak in some nature—a grove of trees, a nearby lake or river—so much the better.

Take a short break from electronics. You don't need to take a long break; that may not even be realistic, especially if you're working. But even five minutes away from all the rings, pings, and dings will help you as an introvert, in two respects: You'll temporarily stop losing energy in response to those stimuli; and you'll be able to briefly recharge and thus regain some of the energy you've already lost.

Take a short breathing or meditation break. "Breathe" can sometimes sound like ridiculous advice; I get it. But deep, slow, controlled breathing from the diaphragm has science behind it; numerous studies



have demonstrated its benefits.

As for meditation: You don't have to be hardcore about it, and you certainly don't have to meditate for a long time. Just a few minutes can slow down your runaway thoughts, feelings, and/or anxiety.

My friend seemed to be asking for permission to simply be who she is. She doesn't need it.

Neither do you. Or I.

When I mailed my book to her, I wanted her to know I had a message for her beyond the words she had asked me to write inside the book's front cover. So I wrote her a card, too.

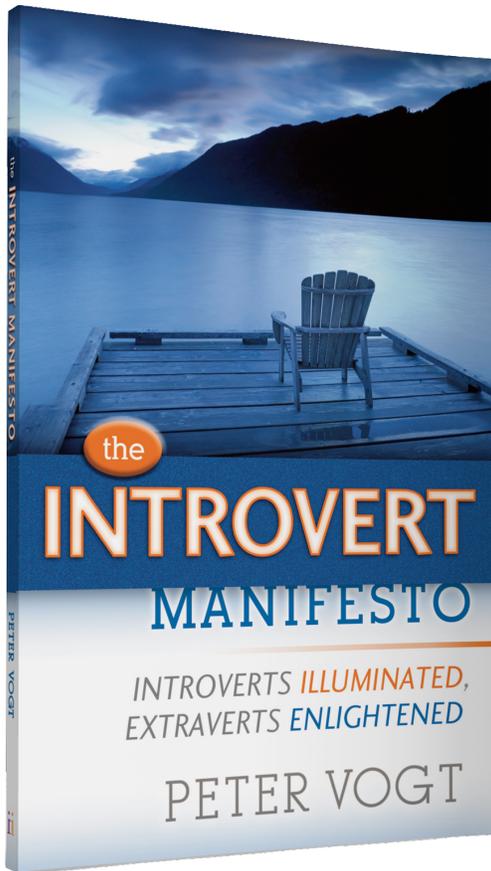
I don't remember exactly what I said, but in essence I told her the same thing I'd like to tell you now:

Your introversion is a normal part of who you are. You don't have to justify it or explain it. You just have to respect it. Go ahead and give yourself what you need when you need it. Just be you.

Sincerely, Peter.

At long last...

CLARITY



“*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

Building Your Resilience Will Help You Prevent Depression

Does being an introvert increase your risk for depression? Yes, some researchers say, particularly if you have a high level of neuroticism.

But a recent study in the *Journal of Positive Psychology & Wellbeing* argues that previous researchers have been viewing the introversion-depression link too simplistically, overlooking the crucial factor of **resilience**: your ability (or lack thereof) to maintain or regain your mental health amidst stress and adversity.

The *Positive Psychology* study involved 158 university students in Ireland who completed measures of their resilience, extraversion, neuroticism, and depressive symptoms, along with an inventory of the recent

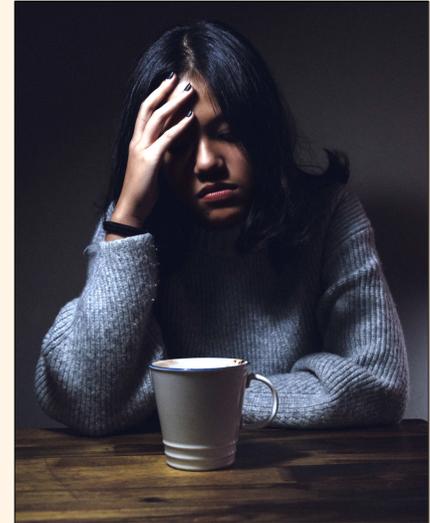
stressful events in their lives.

Researchers Siobhan McDonnell and Maria Semkovska of the University of Limerick found that resilience acts as “a significant mediator in the relationship between extraversion and depressive symptoms.”

“Indeed,” McDonnell and Semkovska note in the article, “our results indicate that resilience not only enhances the positive mood of individuals low in extraversion [i.e., introverts], but also buffers against a potential mood disorder.”

If you’re an introvert, then, and you’re concerned about preventing or beating depression, boosting your resilience—through therapy and/or other strategies—will likely help.

“More introverted individuals are not necessarily destined to suffer from depression,” McDonnell and



Semkovska stress.

Source: “Resilience as Mediator Between Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Depressive Symptoms in University Students,” *Journal of Positive Psychology & Wellbeing*, 10(10) (2020), pp. 1-16.

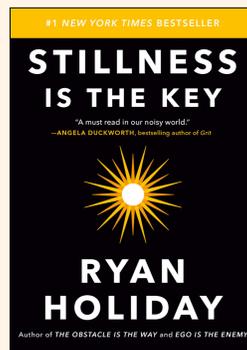
REFLECTIVE READS

Stillness Is the Key Stresses Benefits of Cultivating Quiet

At its core, *Stillness Is the Key* is about quiet—though only tangentially in the context of the daily decibel levels we have to tolerate each day.

Author Ryan Holiday is actually getting at something much more encompassing: the necessity to quiet our minds, our souls, and our bodies if we want to lead happy, healthy, authentic lives.

“This book,” he stresses, “is an attempt to answer the pressing question of our time: If the quiet moments are the best moments, and if so many wise, virtuous people have



sung their praises, why are they so rare?”

The answer, he says, is that we all have inside us plenty of capacity for stillness; we just have a hard time accessing it, especially in the modern world of information overload and near-constant interruption.

But we can (re)train ourselves, Holiday says, particularly by tapping into the wisdom of both the ancient and modern worlds, East and West. Indeed, Holiday is widely known for his expertise helping people translate philosophical principles into practical, everyday action.

The three main sections of *Stillness* cover “The Domain of the Mind,” “The Domain of the Soul,” and “The Domain of the Body.” By the time you’re done reading this thoughtful book, you’ll understand why Holiday sees stillness “not [as] some New Age nonsense or the domain of monks and sages, but in fact desperately necessary to all of us.”

Continued from page 1

compassion.”

“So when I use the phrase ‘acting out of character,’ it means two different but equally powerful ways of explaining a pattern of behavior,” Little writes.

“It simultaneously means people are acting inconsistently with what we have come to expect [from them] and that they are doing it because of something in their character, because of the **values** they wish to express.”

This is the healthy and quite normal way we introverts periodically become ad hoc extraverts.

Sometimes we’re motivated by love, Little says; we go to a party with our spouse, for example, when we’d rather stay home and read. At other times we’re motivated by professionalism; we’re willing and able to, say, pitch an investor on our business idea because we believe strongly in what we’re trying to do.

What we might call *situational* extraversion, then, is reasonable and sensible: You’re **doing** something different, temporarily and purposefully, because you care about

other people and/or you have goals you want to accomplish in our very extraverted world.

What we might call *existential* extraversion, on the other hand—**being** someone different, **being** an extravert (or trying to) when you’re not—is another matter.

Be Who You Are

In her bestselling 2012 book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, author and former lawyer Susan Cain describes a panel she was once part of for an event at Harvard Law School.

With her on the panel were an environmental advocate named Jillian and a trial lawyer named Alison. Both were introverts who sought Cain out for career advice after the event was over.

Jillian, Cain writes, loved her work, especially the research and writing aspects of it. She struggled when she had to make presentations or lead meetings, though, so she simply asked Cain how she could do better in those situations.

Alison, conversely, oozed unhappiness. The next logical step in her career path was to apply for a gener-

al counsel position at a major corporation. But “her heart,” Cain writes, “clearly wasn’t in it,” and she had come to believe what she’d frequently been told: that she simply didn’t have the right personality for the job.

What could she do to change who she was, she asked Cain.

Do you see the crucial distinction between Jillian and Alison?

Jillian wanted only to be better at leading and speaking. Alison wanted to **be somebody else**.

Emulate Jillian.

Being somebody else—or trying to be and inevitably failing—goes nowhere good. Think potential anxiety and depression, just for starters.

You can only **be** who you are, and part of who you are is your tendency toward introversion.

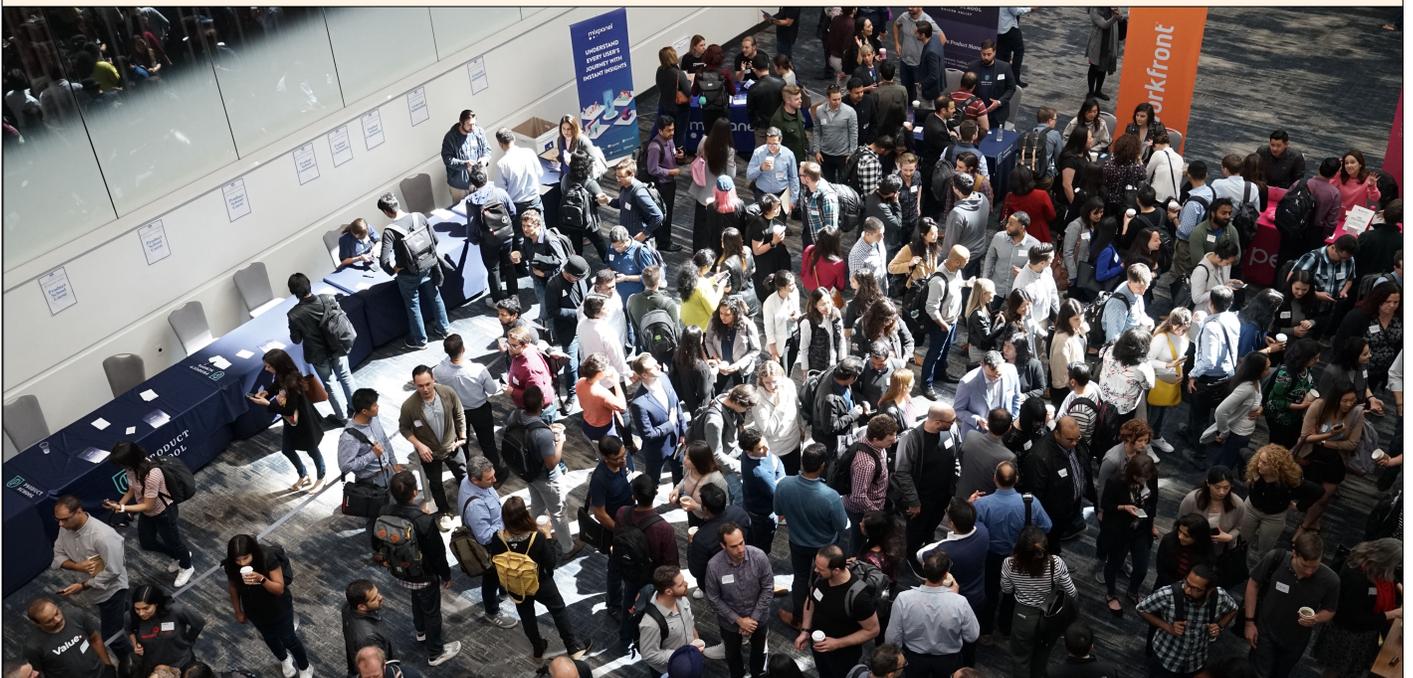
When you need to **act** extraverted, temporarily and for a good cause, go right ahead. Then do what my brother Mark does.

“I don’t have to feel bound to the persona I’ve taken on,” he says.

“I can cast it off after the performance and go fishing or running or shooting at the archery range.”

Alone. No audience.

The show’s over.





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INTROVERT INSPIRATIONS

“Reflecting quietly on your own after a day of workshopping ideas with your team is no less ‘normal’ than the extravert who wants to join others for after-work drinks to rehash the day. Normalize diverse needs.”

~ Mia Eng

“When we know what to say no to, we can say yes to the things that matter.”

~ Ryan Holiday

“Introverts, don’t be afraid to push back when people tell you to change. Don’t be afraid to cancel out the noise and do what feels natural to you—because accepting yourself as the earnest, intelligent, and gifted introvert that you are is the best thing you can do for yourself.”

~ Elizabeth Burnam

“We succeed by honoring our strengths, not by denying our temperaments.”

~ Devora Zack