



# introvert insights

## There's a Reason Why Your Introversion Is So Influential

By Peter Vogt

Imagine your life is a Broadway play, and that the various aspects of your existence—including your introversion—have different roles and prominence in the production.

How significant is the role your introversion plays?

In other words: How much influence—practically speaking—does your introversion really have on your life day to day?

Well, it's far more than a mere bit player or extra, that's for sure. It's actually one of the main characters, if not the star of the show at times.

That's why it matters so much for you to understand your introversion and factor it in to your thinking and behaviors each day. It's not just a part of who you are; it's a **significant** part.

The fascinating backstory of the so-called Big 5 personality traits—*openness to experience, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism*, and of course *extraversion* (which, albeit backhandedly, indicates one's introversion)—drives home the point.

### The Essence of Personality

In 1936, Harvard University psychologist Gordon Allport teamed up with a colleague—Dartmouth College psychologist Henry Odbert—to tackle a seemingly impossible task.

The two men wanted to see if the thousands upon thousands of personality traits that had been identified over the centuries could be boiled down into a much smaller, more manageable set of fundamental traits of human personality.

Allport and Odbert approached the challenge by tapping into an innovative line of thinking called the *lexical hypothesis*, which says that the major dimensions of personality are encoded in the **words** we have come up with to name personality traits.

The men thus broke out the 1925 edition of *Webster's New International Dictionary*—which had more than a half-million words at the time—and compiled a list of just under 18,000 words that described personality, behaviors, and traits.

Of those, 4,500 met the men's definition of a personality trait.

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# TIPS, TRICKS, AND TOOLS

## PERSONAL GROWTH

### Forget Resolutions—Adopt a Guiding “Nudge Word” Instead

New Year’s resolutions are a powerful idea in theory. But they’re often so broad that they end up being useless in the end.

So here’s a better idea, according to *Washington Post* “Well+Being” columnist Tara Parker-Pope: Settle on just one word—a *nudge word*—to internalize and then follow as your North Star this year.

“Think of [the nudge word] as the anti-resolution resolution,” Parker-Pope writes in her recent *Post* article entitled “Pick a New Year’s Nudge Word Instead of a Resolution.”

“Instead of setting a specific goal,

choose a word that captures the mind-set you want to adopt in 2023—a word that will nudge you toward positive change whenever you think of it.”

Parker-Pope used the nudge word strategy herself in 2022. She picked the word *growth* because she felt stuck, professionally and personally.

“At the time I chose [the word], I had no real plans for change, but as I opened my mind to what it means to grow, I suddenly started seeing opportunities all around me,” Parker-Pope writes.

She ended up quitting one job to take on a new one.

“I’ve moved to a different city, rekindled old relationships, and

made new friends. I even decided to go to graduate school, a decision that has been a tremendous source of personal growth and friendships.”

As you consider your own nudge word for this year, think about your values and intentions, Parker-Pope says, along with what well-being means to you.

“And remember,” she stresses, “the real value of the word-of-the-year exercise is the thinking that goes into choosing it.

“Take your time. Try a few words on for size and settle on the one that will help you focus on the things that are most meaningful to you—no matter what surprises 2023 may bring.”

## ONLINE ACTIVITIES

### Build a “Zone of Privacy” into Your Social Media Pursuits

Despite pressures you might feel to the contrary, you can maintain a “zone of privacy” on social media, using it in a way “that fits your personality preferences” as an introvert,

says marketing expert Marcia Yudkin, publisher of the Substack newsletter *Introvert UpThink*.

“Remember that self-expression doesn’t need to involve spilling intimate details about your life,” Yudkin writes in a recent *Truity* website article entitled “Social Media for In-

troverts: How to Thrive as a Quiet Influencer.”

In fact, Yudkin says, you can “let other people follow the trend of confessing their foibles and exposing all of their business and personal connections to public view.”

“You don’t have to,” stresses Yudkin, an introvert herself. “Your guiding rule instead might be ‘post only what I wouldn’t mind being printed in a national newspaper.’”

You can also limit yourself to posting only when you really have something to say, Yudkin says.

“If friends, family, or work colleagues give you grief for sparse social media postings, quote introvert Albert Einstein to them: ‘You ask me if I keep a notebook to record my great ideas,’ he once said. ‘I’ve only ever had one.’”



## Manage Social Activities in a Way That Works for You

Ever been referred to, or referred to yourself, as “antisocial,” simply because you’re an introvert?

You’re not antisocial, says Jenn Granneman, founder of the website *Introvert, Dear* and co-author (with Andre Sóló) of the forthcoming book *Sensitive: The Hidden Power of the Highly Sensitive Person in a Loud, Fast, Too-Much World*.

You’re **selectively** social, Granneman stresses.

In other words, you need social interaction just as much as the next person does. But you want to—and

you can—manage it your way.

One of Granneman’s go-to strategies, she says in a recent *New York Times* article, is to buy—well in advance—two tickets to any event she’s interested in attending.

“Having the extra ticket,” Granneman says, “puts some pressure on me, in a good way, to reach out to my network, because I want someone to go with me and I don’t want the ticket to go to waste.”

Granneman also suggests “giving the gift of going first”: initiating social interactions.

“You might be surprised,” she says, “at how much the other person appreciates you reaching out.”



## FOCUS

### Practice “Deep Reading” to Regain Your Immersion Skills

You—like virtually all people, really—read (scan?) so much on a screen these days that you’ve likely lost some of the deep immersion skills (and opportunities) you crave as an introvert.

You can get them back—or re-sharpen them, as the case may be. But you’re probably going to have to practice, literally, says Maryanne Wolf, a professor-in-residence at the University of California, Los Angeles Graduate School of Education and Information Studies.

“Many people have lost the ability to really immerse themselves,” says Wolf, author of the book *Reader, Come Home: The Reading Brain in a Digital World*.

As Wolf puts it in a recent *New York Times* article (“How to Focus Like It’s 1990”): “We have developed a cognitive impatience about our reading.”

What can you do about it?

Wolf suggests getting back into the practice of what she calls *deep reading*. For 20 minutes a day to start, read a book. A physical book.

Pick one that you want to read for pleasure, set an alarm for 20 minutes, put your phone on silent (or out of reach entirely), and work on reading as slowly and deliberately as you can.

You might struggle, especially in the beginning, Wolf says. When she tried the experiment herself, it was about two weeks before she could consistently settle down and engage with what she was reading.

But your immersion skills do come back. Because they were likely never gone in the first place.

They were just knocked for an electronic loop.



# IT'S AN INTROVERT'S LIFE

## Brown Noise (It's *Lit!*) Is a Tool That Merits the Trendy Attention

By Peter Vogt

I am generally on the late side of things when it comes to recognizing and adopting cultural trends.

I only recently joined Instagram.

I'm just now perfecting my use of the adjective *lit* ("that \_\_\_ is **lit!**"); the experts (my kids) tell me I'm roughly five years behind.

I think TikTok is a noise that a clock makes—except that today, even clocks don't say tick-tock.

Sigh.

I am "hip" on one current trend, though: *brown noise*.

What in God's name is brown noise? I asked myself the same thing when I first heard the term.

For starters, I didn't even know there were different varieties of noise. I'd heard of, and even used, *white noise* before, but it had never occurred to me that noise comes in other colors as well.

But indeed it does.

In fact, the ironically named "White Noise" app on my cell phone (we cool people use apps ... and cell phones) features not just white noise and a variety of other sounds—including the shockingly off-putting drone of a cat purring—but also *pink noise*, *blue noise*, and even *violet noise*.

Oh, and it has brown noise, too.

Brown noise is, I've got to say, quite pleasant. I'm listening to it now as I write this, hoping it won't put me to sleep (nah) with its low-pitched, soothing ambience.

As several of the newspaper articles I read about it suggest, brown noise sounds almost exactly like the low-pitched hum of the jet engine you hear when you're flying at, say, 15,000 feet. It has also been compared, rightfully so, to the sound of a steady wind, or the sound of ocean waves coming to shore.

I've been using brown noise primarily in my home office, which shares a wall with the gaming computer used by our son Théo.

Like we did as kids, Théo plays video games—a lot—with his friends and other people.

Unlike us as kids, Théo isn't physically **with** his friends while he's doing this (nor is he ponying up real, actual quarters every 37 seconds; quarters went out a year or two ago).

No, he's online with them, talking with them ... and laughing with them ... and arguing with them—via a headset.

All of it, of course, comes straight through the wall to me while I'm trying to concentrate—which is why I've got the brown noise going right now, even at the risk of it sending me to la-la land (never happen).

It works well. When I have the brown noise on at high volume on my computer, I don't hear Théo (or anyone/anything else).

What I didn't realize going in, however, was how soothing the brown noise would be, how much it quiets the mind. I had put it on merely to block things (Théo) out. I had no idea I'd be bringing things **in**,



too: better focus, a sense of calm and relaxation.

Yes, I really do wonder at times if the brown noise will knock me out completely someday (no way).

But at the same time, it makes total sense to me that, as the articles I read indicate, brown noise helps people deal with conditions like ADHD, or learning problems, or—understandably—sleep disorders.

One guy who was interviewed for a *Washington Post* article I read on the subject likened brown noise to the feeling of his brain being, as he put it, "hugged." I don't (yet) feel my own brain being squeezed. But I do relate to the sentiment behind the statement.

Yes, the jury is still out on brown noise scientifically speaking, as only a few studies have been done so far with respect to its effectiveness in helping people with various issues.

But it costs virtually nothing for you to give it a try. I encourage you to do so. Just be sure that it doesn't put you to

*Zzzzzzzzz.*

You don't need to be a NEW you in 2023.  
You just need to be the ...

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# PRACTICAL RESEARCH

## Networking Takes More Out of You When You're an Introvert

When it comes to professional networking activities, there are energy tradeoffs for everyone—introverts and extraverts alike. But introverts tend to pay the higher price in terms of the depletion they experience, according to a recent article in the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*.

The article summarizes three studies—two preliminary investigations in a lab setting along with a third in which researchers collected data from participants at several real-world networking events.

The researchers were trying to learn, among other things, whether there were any differences between introverts and extraverts with respect to the energy costs of networking,

despite the fact that networking offers obvious benefits as well.

“[I]f networking experiences are not purely positive, but also negative or ambivalent,” the study’s authors note, “people might forego networking opportunities despite its long-term benefits.”

That tendency to thus avoid networking might be particularly prevalent among introverts, the researchers suspected.

So what did the researchers find?

Yes—networking does indeed take more out of introverts.

“Extraverts show more networking behaviors because it corresponds to their dispositional behavioral tendencies and requires fewer energy resources,” the researchers write.

“In contrast, introverted people experience networking as more de-

pleting. Thus, the cost-benefit ratio appears to be more positive for extraverts and more negative for introverts.”

Does that mean you can’t, or shouldn’t, engage in networking activities if you’re an introvert? Not at all, the researchers stress.

Just “be aware that intensive networking might deplete [your] resources,” the researchers note.

So take a break in the restroom from time to time, they suggest, or take a short walk around the block to recharge and regroup.

**Source:** “The Dark and Bright Side of Networking Behavior: Three Studies on Short-Term Processes of Networking Behavior,” *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 140 (February 2023), published online November 11, 2022.

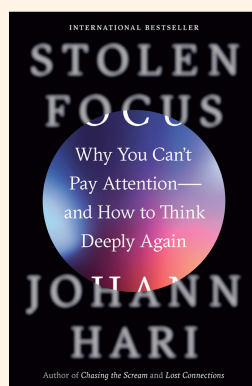
# REFLECTIVE READS

## Stolen Focus: Your Struggle to Focus Goes Beyond You

People will undoubtedly debate the essential conclusions of journalist Johann Hari, author of the fascinating book *Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention—and How to Think Deeply Again*.

If you yourself, for example, battle every hour of every day to find—and then maintain—the focus you so crave as an introvert, you might ask yourself, on the one hand: “Is it just **me**?” That is, do you simply lack discipline, on an individual level?

Or, conversely, are you up against a monstrous **environmental** problem



involving everything from the social media we use to the food we eat to the speed at which we operate in today’s world (and the inevitable stress it all causes)?

Hari argues that it’s primarily the latter—a social issue requiring dra-

matic social changes that will (eventually) bring lasting solutions.

That might feel overwhelming, even depressing. How can you, one person, get the focus you need if you’re up against so much environmental resistance—resistance that you, one person, can do little about?

Well—start by focusing on what you **can** do as one person. Read more physical books and spend less time on your screen. Work on one task at a time. Seek out activities that engage you so deeply that you lose track of time. It will all help.

But, Hari argues—as a challenge and as a warning: We also need to change the world around us.

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What now?

Well, Allport and Odbert ended their own work on the project, publishing their findings—including all 4,500 or so of their trait words—in a paper.

But in the years and decades that followed, others picked up where Allport and Odbert had left off, adding a technique called *factor analysis* into the mix.

Briefly, almost comically so, here's how factor analysis works:

If you survey a large group of people and ask them to rate themselves on various personality characteristics, one by one, you of course get a big set of data. Maybe, for example, everyone has rated themselves on each trait using a scale of 1 (“doesn’t at all describe me”) to 5 (“completely describes me”).

Once you have this data set, you can look at the **collective** responses of the group, comparing the overall ratings between one pair of assessed trait-words at a time to see if those scores correlate highly with each other—and then repeating this process for each trait-word pair.

Over time, through this factor analysis, you see—over and over and over again—that some of the trait-word pairs are measuring the same basic characteristic. In other words, you don’t need both trait-words in that pair; one—albeit one with a different name than either of the original two, perhaps—will do.

This is exactly what researchers did to (eventually ... **very** eventually) realize Allport and Odbert’s vision. Using factor analysis, various researchers culled the number of basic/core human personality traits down to 150 ... and then 35 ... and then 16.

And finally ... five, which are now known—and widely accepted, given their scientific identification—as the Big 5 personality traits.

## A Leading Role

Now, is the Big 5 idea a flawless, undebated concept? Of course not. Nothing is, or ever will be, perfect where human beings are concerned. And there will always be healthy disagreements to consider.

But just think about it ...

Out of all the potential personality traits we’ve given names to as humans, and all that were once in the “cut” to be deemed core/fundamental parts of human personality, your introversion (again, backhandedly measured by your level of the Big 5 trait *extraversion*) is one of them!

So you can be sure that on the playbill of your life, your introversion is on there somewhere.

Prominently.





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## INTROVERT INSPIRATIONS

"The next time someone asks you why you're so quiet, try asking them why they're so loud."

~ Arden Mason-Ourique

"Being your most authentic self as an introvert means making time (and protecting it) to be alone, digest all that has happened, and sift through the feelings it stokes. Be gentle with yourself, and be kind and clear with others about what you need to achieve that."

~ Melissa Coade

"[I]t makes me a much better public speaker to be an introvert, because I don't like holding court—it freaks me out. But I like talking to individuals [in the audience]."

~ Simon Sinek

"[Y]ou have the right to a deep, rich inner life: to be an 'intro-naut,' to seek out solitude and not have to explain yourself, to be yourself—not what others think or say you should be."

~ Pete Mosley