

i introvert insights

Extraversion Is (Still) the Ideal We're Supposed to Strive for

By Peter Vogt

Imagine you go to the website Thesaurus.com and look up the word *introverted*, and instead of seeing synonyms like *reclusive* and *cautious* and *cool* listed there, you see *independent* and *thorough* and *calm*.

Then imagine you look up the word *extroverted*, and instead of seeing words like *outgoing* and *personable* and *demonstrative*, you see *overdaring* and *oversharing* and *overbearing*.

Imagine you're the parent of two elementary school children—one an extravert, the other an introvert—and you get this email from the extraverted child's teacher:

Dear _____,

I'm concerned about your son _____. He has too many friends in class, he speaks up too readily and too vocally during classroom discussions, and he is only capable of doing his work when teaming up with other children.

Typically, we expect children this age to focus on quality vs. quantity when

it comes to friends (i.e., less is more); to listen attentively during class discussions (instead of verbally interjecting), so they can carefully process what is going on; and to work confidently alone on their assignments.

That same day, you get an email from your introverted child's teacher as well:

Dear _____,

I'm so happy for, and proud of, your daughter _____. She has one solid friend in class, she listens intently during classroom discussions—clearly she is thinking deeply!—and she works by herself with great skill. All things we prize in children this age.

Imagine you (an introvert) and an extraverted work colleague are called into your boss's office one morning, presumably to find out which of you is getting the big promotion and accompanying raise.

"Shut the door behind you," your boss says as the two of you walk in.

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TIPS, TRICKS, AND TOOLS

RELATIONSHIPS

Go Ahead—Prioritize *Quality* as You Interact with Others

When you're an introvert, it's perfectly OK—and **smart**—to prioritize quality over quantity in your day-to-day interactions with others, says Susan Cain, author of the bestselling book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*.

Now, why would Cain have to come out and say something so seemingly self-evident?

Because “there’s a tremendous amount of pressure to spread yourself socially thin,” she writes in her *Kindred Newsletter* article entitled “Are You a Millionaire in Time?”

Extraverted culture tends to push

a more-is-better approach to relationships. “If that doesn’t suit you, resist!” Cain advises. “Create the social life that nourishes **you**.”

How?

“Identify the people and animals whose company you love,” Cain writes, “and spend as much time with them as you can.”

“Many of us,” she stresses, “would rather devote ourselves to a few treasured souls rather than divide our time among a vast array of family, friends, and acquaintances.”

Instead of fighting that instinct, go ahead and follow it.

As Cain puts it in a separate article, this one entitled “When Does Socializing Make You Happier?”

If you don't cast your social net too wide, you're more likely to cast it deep—which your friends and family will appreciate.



PERSONAL GROWTH

You May Not See Your Own Strengths—but *Others* Do

It might sound strange, but it's true: You likely aren't aware of at least some of your own strengths as an introvert—because you're simply too close to yourself to see them.

But **other** people see them **in** you, says Mary Shapiro, a fellow at the Simmons University Institute for Inclusive Leadership, and instructor for a course called “Introverts as Leaders” in Harvard University’s Professional Development Program.

So if you want to get a complete

picture of your own best traits, Shapiro says in a recent CNBC website article, ask a few people you've worked with to give you brief write-ups about times when they have seen you at your best.

The exercise is “the most powerful thing,” Shapiro says in the article, entitled “An 85-Year Harvard Study on the Key to Happiness Could Spell Trouble for Introverts—Unless You Know These 2 Tricks.”

You might learn, for example, that your old boss always saw you as deeply engaged in meetings, even if you were often quiet in the moment as you contemplated what others were doing and saying.

Or you might find out how the people you interacted with at company get-togethers appreciated your one-on-one communication skills.



“Sea Anemone” Tactic Helps You Connect at Huge Events

When you’re an introvert, one of the toughest socializing situations you face—be it in a work or a personal context—is the giant gathering (think conference or party) where either a) you don’t know anyone, or b) the people you do know are tied up talking to other people.

What to do?

Marti Olsen Laney, author of *The Introvert Advantage*, suggests thinking, and acting, like a sea anemone.

“Sea anemones are creatures that attach themselves to rocks, their ten-

tacles swaying with the ocean currents,” Laney writes.

“Then along floats some edible tidbits, and the sea anemones’ tentacles lure them in.”

Laney describes an introverted client of hers, Patrick, who entered a standing-room-only crowd at a Washington, D.C., conference.

Patrick knew no one at the event. So instead of jumping into the middle of the mass of people, he went upstairs to a balcony overlooking all the action and sat in one of the comfortable chairs there.

“After a while,” Laney writes, “several other escapees from the crush below came up, and soon they

were all sitting down and chatting at an innie [introvert] pace.”

Laney continues:

I always feel like this when I set up shop in some corner or viewing site at a party. I am so much more comfortable sitting down, anchored to my rock, than I am wandering around the room.

Sure enough, sooner or later some folks drift by. I give a small, friendly smile and they often stop to exchange pleasantries. Some stay a while, and some drift off.

Soon another guest bobs over for chitchat.

MENTAL HEALTH

Do a Written “Brain Dump” to Tame Your Runaway Thoughts

Next time you get trapped in a nasty cycle of overthinking about something, try a strategy that will get all those thoughts out of your head and onto paper—where you can better assess them and manage them, suggests Vicky Regina, a certified mindset coach who specializes in helping introverted women.

In her recent *Medium* website article entitled “6 Tactics for Introverts to Tame the Overthinking Mind,” Regina describes what she calls her *brain dump* tactic.

“When caught in the vortex [of overthinking], grab a notebook or scrap piece of paper and write down every single thought that’s flying around in your brain about whatever it is you’re obsessing over. The good, the bad, and the ugly,” Regina writes.

This gives your brain a chance to “return to neutral,” Regina says, so

that later, you can revisit your list and evaluate everything you wrote down more calmly and objectively.

Among the questions Regina suggests that you ask about each item:

How true is this?

Does this really matter in the big picture?

What’s a different way of thinking about this?

“A lot of times, when you see all the mental drama on paper ..., you’ll be able to see how untrue most (if not all!) the concerns are,” Regina notes, “and you’ll be able to sift through the non-helpful thoughts to see what’s really true for you.

“Over time, you may even spot themes in your overthinking mind, which will help you shut it down faster in the future.”



IT'S AN INTROVERT'S LIFE

You Can Bring Your Introverted Strengths to Most Any Activity

By Peter Vogt

Back in the early 2000s, I was “The Campus Career Coach” for the global career website *Monster*. It was a contract job that paid a monthly stipend, and I was responsible for producing one article each week; writing a weekly newsletter for opt-in subscribers; and running a weekly live chat where college students and recent grads could ask me career-related questions in real time.

I loved all of it.

But there was one additional piece of the job that surpassed all the rest of them put together: the “Campus” online message board, where students/grads could ask questions **asynchronously** and I could then respond to them **asynchronously** as well.

Up to that point, I hadn't pieced together the fact that I could help people—which is all I've ever really wanted to do, bottom line—and be my introverted self at the same time.

It had never really occurred to me that I had introverted strengths, and that I could leverage them—purposefully and proactively—in a way that would help both me (in terms of personal fulfillment) and others.

But the “Campus” message board experience—which ended up lasting nearly 10 years!—opened my eyes.

It was like being Dear Abby.

Students and grads posted their questions and I responded to them—as best I could, and in considerable individualized detail—with not only

advice but also encouragement and, often, reassurances that whatever the questioner was experiencing was quite normal.

The folks at *Monster* told me, repeatedly, that I didn't need to respond to every question that was posted, and that I didn't need to write a novel each time I did so.

But I loved it all so much that that's exactly what I ended up doing.

The interactions were so gratifying. I learned as much as I taught, and best of all ... we all got to “talk” with our fingers! And we all got to think carefully first **before** we talked with our fingers!

I was sad when it all ended in 2010. But in the back of my mind, I told myself I would find a way to replicate the experience someday.

Well, someday is here.

A powerful part of my new online course (“Be the Introvert You Are!”—see ad on the adjacent page) is the “Be the Introvert You Are!” community I've created on the course's hosting platform, Thinkific.

The interactions there are—once again—so gratifying, so fun. I feel as though I've put on a comfortable, **comforting** old shirt and a) it still fits!, and b) it's still producing the desired effect.

It took me a while, I'll admit, but now I get it: You can put an introverted spin on almost any job, any activity you can think of; you can contribute in an introverted way.

Sometimes, as it did with me at *Monster*, the opportunity falls into



your lap. But it's even better when you can create it yourself.

My wife, Adrienne—a kindergarten teacher as well as a fellow introvert—has experienced both the fall-in-your-lap and create-it forms of this phenomenon over the last few years.

In the spring of 2020, she and so many other in-person teachers ended up becoming **online** teachers overnight as the pandemic took hold.

Unlike most of the other teachers we know, however, Adrienne enjoyed it. And she was good at it, because it played to so many of her introverted strengths and preferences.

So when the opportunity came for her to continue teaching online in the district, she took a calculated risk and accepted the job. The gig lasted two additional school years.

She's back in the in-person kindergarten classroom now, which she also loves. But she, too, learned a lesson along the way, one that all of us introverts should take to heart:

Your introversion travels well—no matter what you're doing in life.

No more defending your introversion.
No more pretending to be the extravert you're not.
It's time to ...

BE YOU

Online Course



BE THE INTROVERT YOU ARE!

The Introvert's Way to a Healthy, Happy Life

Run your own life, your own way. Starting today. Learn more and enroll at:

course.introvertinsights.com

PRACTICAL RESEARCH

Introverts Feel—and Perform—Better in Private Workspaces

While extraverts are happier and more focused in work environments with open seating arrangements, introverts feel—and do—better when they can work in private offices, according to a recent study in the *Journal of Research in Personality*.

The study involved 173 staffers in four federal office buildings who worked in one of three settings: an open-seating area, a cubicle, or a private office.

For three consecutive days, the participants were periodically prompted (via cell phone) to respond to questions that allowed them to self-assess their in-the-moment focus, well-being, and mood.

The people in the study who had

high levels of extraversion (as determined by a pre-study personality test) felt and performed better when they worked in an open-office area.

The study participants with lower levels of extraversion (i.e., introverts), on the other hand, fared worse—especially with respect to focus—in open-office environments.

The study's findings provide evidence that personality matters when it comes to workplace environment design and employee performance and well-being—perhaps more so than many employers believe.

“Our work illuminates the importance of considering both the individual's personality and their environment in predicting important behavioral and mood outcomes, such as how happy a person is and how well a person is able to work,” says

University of Arizona psychology professor Matthias Mehl, senior author of the study.

“In this vein, we demonstrate that when employers design and allocate workspaces, it may be beneficial to take an employee-centered approach.”

“[T]he workspace should be designed to fit the worker, and not the other way around,” adds study co-author Esther Sternberg, research director for the University of Arizona's Andrew Weil Center for Integrative Medicine.

Sources: “Personality, Workstation Type, Task Focus, and Happiness in the Workplace,” *Journal of Research in Personality*, 103 (April 2023), published online December 26, 2022; University of Arizona news release, February 21, 2023.

REFLECTIVE READS

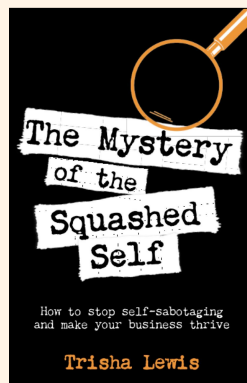
Squashed Self Exposes the Cost of Fighting Your Nature

If you're angry with yourself, you may simply be frustrated with yourself for not **being** yourself.

That's the overarching theme in Trisha Lewis's cleverly presented book *The Mystery of the Squashed Self*.

Squashed self is Lewis's made-up term that she defines as follows:

Suppressing your true self due to a fear that revealing and owning your full passion, personality, and power will have you judged as an unlikeable show-off or an unprofessional outsider.



Many introverts, of course, struggle with this very phenomenon; the temptation to be someone you're not (or try to) is great in our extraverted world and culture.

The Mystery of the Squashed Self doesn't target introverts per se. But

you will find that many of the book's vignettes speak to you.

Lewis uses a fictional mystery format to drive home her message.

In each chapter of the book, Investigator Lewis—a sort of private detective—interviews someone who is struggling with a squashed-self type of problem.

Lewis then brings her notes, and her own hunches about the problem and its potential solutions, to her colleague Professor P, who adds her psychological expertise.

It's an offbeat way to teach some powerful lessons—lessons you'll remember long after each mini mystery is solved.

Continued from page 1

Then, after you both sit down, the boss turns to you first and says:

_____, *I've decided to promote you to the new position. The work you've done has been superb, and you've done it almost exclusively on your own, independently and efficiently. I've always appreciated your ability to think carefully before you act, and to focus intently on your work instead of water-cooler conversations and other time wasters. Congratulations.*

Then your boss turns to your colleague and says:

_____, *your work has been good too; don't get me wrong. You just need to be more of an individual player, and to work more independently and less*

collaboratively. You need to do more thinking and less acting, and you need to do your work instead of constantly trying to build relationships with others. I'm sorry, but ... maybe next time.

A Slanted Playing Field

Sadly, the scenarios I've come up with here are ridiculous bordering on absurd.

The reason? In Western culture at least, extraversion—and extraverted words, beliefs, and behaviors—are the norm, the ideal we are all (supposed to be) striving for.

Introversions—and introverted words, beliefs, and behaviors—are typically the opposite. Not always, mind you, but frequently.

I bring all this up not to bitch and moan about it. Complaining is not only ineffective; it's dis-empowering as well.

I bring it up simply to point out—and to urge you to keep in mind—that as an introvert living in an extraverted culture, you are dealing with a slanted playing field.

This affects you personally, of course, but it also affects the people you care about who are introverts. You, and they, need to remember: A slanted playing field isn't an impossible playing field, but it's a slanted one nonetheless.

So you need to be ready to deal with it. Always.

A few years ago, I mentioned to an old high school friend of mine that I was an introvert.

"You're not an **INTROVERT!**" she gasped in response, as though I had said "I'm a serial killer."

Imagine if I'd told her I was an extravert, and that she'd responded: "You're not an **EXTRAVERT!**"

Hard to imagine, isn't it.





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INTROVERT INSPIRATIONS

“There are many traits you possess as an introvert that can help you stand out without the need to change who you are.”

~ Saima Chadney

“Don't let introversion hold you back. ... Use your powers for good. You may be able to dive deep into subjects others would skim over, make stronger connections when you really vibe with someone, or bring a new point of view to the table.”

~ Ryan O'Keeffe

“Maybe that is all an introvert really is; a person craving real people so much that they are prepared to enjoy their own company if they do not show up.”

~ Nausicaa Twila

“Without sounding too melodramatic, it came as a relief when I finally understood that I was introverted. That understanding gave me permission to feel the way I was feeling and shape my life accordingly.”

~ Louise Jackson