



# introvert insights

## Finally, Introversion Is Defined by What It *Is* vs. What It *Is Not*

By Peter Vogt

Do you, as someone who tends toward introversion, refer to yourself as *not extraverted*? Do you run around saying “I’m not an extravert”?

Of course not (or at least I hope not!). You probably just say you’re *introverted* or *an introvert* instead.

Or maybe you keep things precise by saying something like, well, “I tend toward introversion.” Great!

Note, though, how you don’t say “I tend toward lack of extraversion.”

Do you describe yourself as *not warm, not gregarious, not assertive, not active, not positive, not [fill-in-other-extraverted-trait(s)-here]*?

Once again—of course not.

You don’t describe yourself as, or define yourself by, what you’re **not**. You focus on what you **are**.

Why is it, then, that in both everyday life and—much more so—in academic research, introversion is so frequently seen ... and referred to ... and studied not as its own entity with its own positive aspects and descriptors, but rather as—to coin a term—*non-extraversion*?

Why not look at ... and refer to ... and study introversion as *introversion* instead?

And why not identify the key traits that characterize introversion, instead of saying introversion is simply the opposite of, or lack of, the ones that characterize extraversion?

It’s all a bit strange, isn’t it?

That’s what researchers Dane Blevins, Madelynn Stackhouse, and Shelley Dionne point out in an eye-opening—and empowering—article in the *International Journal of Management Reviews*.

“Righting the Balance: Understanding Introverts (and Extraverts) in the Workplace” is groundbreaking if only for one reason.

For the first time—particularly in the realm of research—it attempts to define introversion by what it **is** vs. what it **is not**.

### Facets of Introversion

*Extraversion* is one of the so-called Big 5 personality traits, along with *openness to experience, conscientious-*

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# TIPS, TRICKS, AND TOOLS

## MENTAL HEALTH

### Use Distraction Strategies to Break the Grip of Rumination

You're an introvert, so you like—and largely benefit from—all the deep thinking you do.

But there's such a thing as overdoing it at times, especially when you're experiencing something negative. Your usual reflection can morph into unhealthy *rumination*: fixating too much on what's behind your stress and what you can, or should, do about it.

How to get out of the cycle? Use good old-fashioned distraction, says rumination expert Megan Rogers, an assistant professor of psychology at Texas State University.

“When you first realize that you're starting to ruminate, it can be helpful to find a short-term distraction to break the thought cycle,” Rogers writes in her recent *Psyche* website article entitled “Stuck in a Loop of Worrying Thoughts? Here's How to Stop It.”

Among Rogers' suggestions:

“Mentally or physically intensive” activities, like doing a puzzle or going on a run.

“Sensation-rich” activities, like holding an ice cube.

People activities, like calling a family member or playing a game with a friend.

Rumination can be particularly tough to deal with before bed, when you're trying to fall asleep. In that case, pick a distraction activity that is just engaging enough to trick your brain, yet not so engaging that it, too, keeps you awake, says Michelle Drerup, director of behavioral sleep medicine at Cleveland Clinic.

One idea: Picturing your favorite place and imagining what each of your senses would be feeling there.

“You're engaging all your neural pathways so that other thoughts don't come in,” Drerup notes in a recent *Consumer Reports* website article (by Joanne Chen) entitled “How to Fall Asleep When Your Mind Won't Rest.”

## ENERGY MANAGEMENT

### Be on Guard for Self-Inflicted “Energy Leakage” Drains

When you think of what wears you out as an introvert, you probably think—rightfully so—of the obvious stuff: the demands of your job, for example, or the household chores you have to do, or the unending

errands you need to run.

But you should also watch out for insidious “energy leakage”: the “invisible ways we spend energy throughout the day that leave us feeling drained,” says Melissa Urban, author of *The Book of Boundaries: Set the Limits That Will Set You Free*.

Sometimes that leakage is even self-inflicted, Urban stresses—particularly if you have kids.

“Kids are needy—they need things all the time—and they don't have the processing for you to be, like, ‘Dude, I need a minute,’” Urban acknowledges in a recent *Huffington Post* website article (by Jillian Wilson) entitled “Feeling Drained? You're Probably Dealing with ‘Energy Leakage.’ Here's What to Know.”

As a result, you may be checking in with your kids constantly—even when they're content—to see if they need a snack, for example, or a drink.

Don't, Urban says.

As Wilson puts it: “In the end, you're just putting more pressure on yourself in this moment when, really, your child is just fine.”



## “Sensory Rest” Will Help You Recover from Noise Overload

Rest goes well beyond sleeping better or giving your brain a thinking break, says physician and work-life integration researcher Saundra Dalton-Smith, author of *Sacred Rest: Recover Your Life, Renew Your Energy, Restore Your Sanity*.

In fact, as Dalton-Smith illustrates in her book—as well as in a recent CNN website article by Terry Ward (“7 Strategies for Truly Restorative Rest”)—our minds and bodies need seven different types of rest to be at their best.

One of the types that is likely critical to you as an introvert is what

Dalton-Smith calls *sensory rest*.

“Many of us are not aware of the amount of sensory input we experience during the day, so we stay at a level of sensory overload,” Dalton-Smith says in the CNN piece.

Screen time is one obvious culprit, Dalton-Smith says, but it’s far from the only one.

“Things like background noises—even just people talking—can add to sensory overload,” she says. “We need rest from that.”

So do what you can to control unnecessary noises, Dalton-Smith stresses. Reduce or eliminate notifications on your phone. Turn the TV off when no one is watching.

“Most of us do some of these



restorative activities naturally,” Dalton-Smith says.

“We intuitively know when it will make us feel better.”

## COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

### To Add—or Revise—Your Thoughts, Just Circle Back

The meeting discussion blew past you and on to another topic.

Or you just clicked “send” on the email you’d already put so much thought into.

And now—**now!**— that (additional) something you have to say comes to mind.

Argh!

“We introverts beat ourselves up about this, but fellow I’s, this is how our brains work,” says leadership coach Renee Moelders, in her recent blog post entitled “Introverts, Share Your Thinking!”

Moelders’ advice: Stop with the beating up. Instead just circle back.

If you’re still in that meeting, for example, “Say, ‘Can we go back for a minute? I’m having another thought about the timing of the project launch,’” Moelders says.

Similarly, she says, if you’ve just

sent out that email, reply to it yourself “and adjust the subject line, adding ‘Use this version’ or ‘NEW’ at the top; [then] write ‘I had an additional thought, so please use this revised version.’”

Moelders says she frequently has conversations with people that end up triggering an additional thought

(or three) in her brain soon afterwards, when it is seemingly too late.

“Rather than engage in the usual little voice rib-kicking me about it, I ask myself if it’s still appropriate to share it,” she says.

“Usually, it is!”

And usually, the same will be true for you as well.



# IT'S AN INTROVERT'S LIFE

## Overdo Your Follow-Through— Because Tentative Is Risky

By Peter Vogt

Whenever I'm shooting free throws on the basketball court, I can tell instantly—the moment the ball leaves my sweaty 55-year-old fingertips—whether I'm about to experience a make or a miss, success or failure, imaginary cheers or imaginary jeers.

It's all in the follow-through.

If I've followed through well on my shot, the ball launches from my hand with zip, arcs gracefully, and inevitably goes in—usually whispering through the net, almost not even touching it, and spinning right back to me at the free throw line.

Magic.

If I've followed through poorly, the ball comes off my hand sluggishly, with too little backspin, and clanks off the rim—even missing the rim altogether occasionally, resulting in what is known to basketball fans as an embarrassing *airball*.

Tragic.

My high school basketball coach, John Erickson, spent a lot of time talking to us about free throws and follow-through.

Picture your shooting hand literally following the ball over the front rim and down into the basket, he said. Snap your wrist forward emphatically at the end of your shooting motion, in an exaggerated, borderline ridiculous way—on purpose—so that your fingers end up pointed down at the floor once you've released the ball.

Then hold that manufactured position—again, on purpose—until well after you've seen the result.

It's impossible, Coach Erickson stressed, to overdo it; to follow through too dramatically.

In fact, he said, follow through right and you'll have a hard time missing, even—especially—under pressure.

Follow through wrong, on the other hand, and disappointment is all but certain.

The other day when I was practicing my free throws at the gym, I made 13 in a row at one point.

It was all in the follow-through.

The next day, the best I could muster was three in a row.

It was all in the follow-through again. The lack thereof, at any rate. And I knew it. But I didn't really understand why.

Until now.

I always figured that in his passionate sermons on follow-through, Coach's attention was centered squarely on the end of the shot—especially as he was forever screaming “finish the shot, finish the shot!” through the immense hands on his 6-foot-7-inch frame.

But follow-through, I've come to realize—and Coach Erickson undoubtedly knew it way back then— isn't really about **finishing** right, at least not directly.

It's about backhandedly guaranteeing that you **start** right—so that, in an oddly retroactive sort of way, a successful outcome basically takes



care of itself.

When you intentionally accentuate your follow-through, you end up confidently **shooting** the ball instead of trying to **steer** it into the basket.

In so doing, you provide undeniable evidence, to both yourself and the universe, that you mean business; that you are genuinely committed to the shot you're taking and not simply hoping for the best.

You thus acknowledge and accept, through your actions, that tentative is far riskier than confident.

So you choose—you ooze—confidence.

And then you hold that position until well after you've seen the result.

It's one thing to merely **say** “I'm confident” or “I'm committed” in life. But the universe—and your brain—demands proof.

Follow-through—exaggerated, borderline ridiculous follow-through in our activities, in whatever form(s) it might take—is that proof.

The proof that makes our shots launch with zip, arc gracefully, and go in.

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

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# PRACTICAL RESEARCH

## Your Job Search Will Go Better When You Take Mental Breaks

Next time you're looking for a new job, take mental breaks from the process once in a while—particularly if, like many introverts, you find the activity draining to begin with, suggests a recent article in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

By purposely engaging in “psychological detachment” from your job search from time to time, you'll not only maintain your well-being, the article says; you'll also get better results, at least as measured by the number of interviews you land.

The article describes a pair of studies (the second a general replication of the first) in which college students seeking jobs or internships were questioned once a week for sev-

en weeks about their related search activities. Beforehand, the students also completed a survey that measured their self-perceived proneness to depletion during a job/internship search.

The studies' key finding: Participants who engaged in more psychological detachment activities each week ended up putting more effort into their searches, thanks to the replenishment and “renewed vigor” they got from taking the mental breaks. That increased effort, in turn, led to more interviews.

“[W]e present support for a novel idea in the job search literature: there is an indirect, **positive** effect of **not** being mentally engaged with the job search,” the study authors write.

“Practically,” they add, “our most direct implication is that job

seekers who feel fatigued by job seeking should take time to psychologically detach” from it.

How can you do that, exactly? In a brief follow-up study, the researchers asked that question of 184 additional job/internship seekers.

The top five responses:

Watching TV or movies

Playing video games

Sleeping

Hanging out with friends

Listening to music

**Source:** “Does Psychological Detachment Benefit Job Seekers? A Two-Study Weekly Investigation,” *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 107(12) (December 2022), pp. 2319-2333.

# REFLECTIVE READS

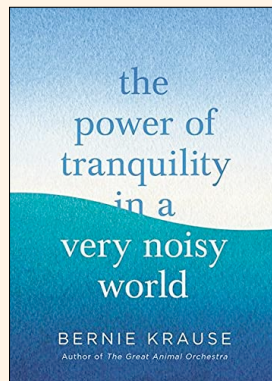
## Power of Tranquility Highlights the Price(s) We Pay for Noise

The first words you see in *The Power of Tranquility in a Very Noisy World*—in the promotional copy inside the front cover—are these:

*You've decluttered your personal space; now it's time to declutter your soundscape.*

The suggestion is that *Tranquility* author Bernie Krause is to noise as Marie Kondo is to clutter, and to some degree that's true.

Krause, a musician and naturalist who has decades of experience in



bioacoustics and natural sound, **does** advocate for “realiz[ing] the healing powers of positive acoustic encounters while, at the same time, reducing or eliminating the effects of toxic sonic habitats that most of us find ourselves surrounded by.”

But it might be more apt to compare Krause with military personnel who detect and disarm landmines—because so much of the noise in our lives is so hidden (i.e., beyond our awareness) and so harmful.

It's got to go, Krause says—and in its place we need to seek out healthier soundscapes if we want to have healthier, happier lives.

Krause covers specific ways to do that, some of them easy, others less so. He also articulates the stakes:

*In the end, we're going to have to figure out how to switch out the encounters that harm us with nourishing actions that sustain.*

Continued from page 1

ness, agreeableness, and neuroticism. (Note: For the fascinating scientific backstory on how the Big 5 were identified, see the January 2023 issue of *Introvert Insights*, page 1.)

Everyone’s personality, the thinking goes, is made up of some combination of these five broad traits. (I’m oversimplifying here, but you get the general idea.)

Each of the Big 5 traits, in turn, is composed of six traits of their own called *facets*.

The facets of extraversion are:

*Warmth/friendliness*

*Gregariousness*

*Assertiveness*

*Activity level*

*Excitement seeking*

*Cheerfulness/positive emotion*

What are the facets of **introversion** (extraversion’s counterpart on the extraversion-introversion spectrum), you might ask?

None have ever been spelled out—none besides, I suppose, *unwarmth* or *low warmth*, *ungregariousness* or *low gregariousness*, and so on.

So in their article, Blevins et al. offer their proposals on the matter.

The researchers did not pull their ideas out of the sky. They analyzed 69 academic articles (from psychological and management journals), all of which featured explicit hypotheses about the role of extraversion and/or introversion in the phenomenon(a) being investigated.

Here are the three proposed facets of introversion they came up with:

***Introspective thoughtfulness*** (characterized by the adjectives or action statements *reflective*, *observant*, *sense-making*, *deep thinking*, and *analytical*)

***Independent mindset*** (*works independently*, *autonomous*, *self-sufficient*, *self-reliant*, *enhanced sensory processing*).

***Solitude preference*** (*internally driven*, *enjoys being alone*, *recharge/recover internally*, *appreciates solitary activities*, *quieter*).

“We suggest, by conceptualizing introverted individuals with more positively valenced characteristics (such as being reflective, independent, and analytical), that research can more clearly capture the benefits tied to introversion,” Blevins et al. conclude in their article.

The researchers stress that the facets they’ve identified comprise a “working list of adjectives and traits [of introversion] that future scholars may wish to revisit and refine.”

Fair enough.

But now scholars—and the rest of us—at least have some way to define introversion besides *not* \_\_\_\_\_.

Analytical  
Self-sufficient  
Sense-making  
Observant  
Enjoys being alone  
Enhanced sensory processing  
Reflective  
Appreciates solitary activities  
Recharge/recover internally  
Internally driven  
Works independently  
Self-reliant  
Deep thinking  
Autonomous  
Quieter

Source: Dane P. Blevins, Madelynn R. D. Stackhouse, and Shelley D. Dionne (2022). “Righting the Balance: Understanding Introverts (and Extraverts) in the Workplace.” *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 24 (January), pp. 78-98.



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## INTROVERT INSPIRATIONS

“Finding your voice as an introvert is not easy, but once you do it’s incredibly powerful.”

~ Lauren Meyer

“The more your goal truly arises from your authentic self, the more likely you are to be committed and take action. This is particularly important for introverts as they decide *how* to accomplish their goals.”

~ Beth Buelow

“As an introvert, understanding your own strengths and needs—and how to make the most of them—will be the secret to your success.”

~ David Hall

“Embrace your introversion. ... [It] can be a source of creativity, focus, and depth of thought, and you need to embrace these qualities and use them to your advantage.”

~ Melanie Shmois