

How to Survive, Excel and Advance as an Introvert

A Guide for Introverts —
and Extroverts Who Want to Understand Them Better



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***Managing Expectations
Communication Gaps and How to Close Them
How to Establish Service Level Agreements***

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COMMUNICATION

Chatterboxes and Cave Dwellers

While on a train ride, I overheard four people engaged in lively chatter. Well, that's not quite correct. Three of them were soft-spoken and reserved. The fourth, a gregarious conversationalist, dominated the interaction. She caught my attention when she said to one of the others: "You have a lot of ideas for such a quiet person."

What a misconception — that a quiet person lacks ideas! Yet, it's an easy mistake to make. After all, if a person has ideas, that person would spout those ideas, right? Well, not necessarily. In fact, one's verbosity in expressing ideas is no clue at all to the quantity of one's ideas. What this woman was experiencing, but didn't realize, was the difference between her own communication style as an extravert and that of her three seat-mates, who were all introverts.

Actually, both introverts and extraverts can talk your head off. And both need quiet time for reflection. But as emphasized by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, introverts and extraverts differ in where they get their energy. The result is a huge difference in communication style. (This spelling of "extravert" is not a typo. In everyday English, it's spelled "extrovert." However, in the context of psychological Type, it is typically spelled "extravert.")

Extraverts get their energy from interaction and tend to be much more animated and expressive than introverts. They enjoy being with people, and can talk with people all day long and still enjoy a group gathering in the evening.

Introverts get their energy internally; much of their communication takes place on the inside, a private place not accessible by others. Thus, they are often less talkative, animated and expressive. And they lose energy from interaction. The very process of talking — or even listening — for an extended period depletes an introvert's energy. As a result, they have a much greater need for

Cave Time to recharge.

Is it any wonder the two types confuse each other? Extraverts think out loud. All that talking is actually the thought process in action. It's not surprising, therefore, that they may appear to be changing their minds in mid-sentence as they work out their ideas and draw conclusions.

Introverts, by contrast, process their thoughts internally and *then* voice them — if indeed they voice them at all. They often prefer time to reflect on a thought before voicing it. As a result, they may take longer to respond than extraverts, but may be more articulate when (if!) they do respond; after all, their utterances have been through several rehearsals already.

Taken to an extreme, introverts look at extraverts and wonder if they'll


ever stop yapping, and extraverts

look at introverts and wonder if there's anyone at home. Yet, these differences are very real, and we will get along better if we try to understand them, respect them, and find ways to laugh about them together.

We can also help others understand our

own style. For example, extraverts can remind their introverted colleagues not to mistake the ideas they are voicing for their final thought on the matter; they are just thinking out loud. Introverts can remind their extraverted buddies that they need a time-out or a break or a week alone in Hawaii.

Perhaps we can all learn how to collaborate in our communication so that we can respect each other's style without sacrificing our own. How wonderful it would be if we could give each other permission to raise concerns about how we are communicating so that we can make adjustments in support of our relationships.

As for me, I've had my say and I'm off to the cave. 



Contents

1	Introduction	
	Section overview	1.1
	Objectives of this Guide	1.2
	Terminology used in this Guide	1.4
	The story behind the introverted story	1.6
2	Gaining Insight into Yourself and Others	
	Section overview	2.1
	Are you an introvert or extrovert?	2.2
	Self-assessment grid	2.3
	Assessing your self-assessment responses	2.4
	Comparing yourself with your teammates	2.6
3	Understanding Introversion and Extroversion	
	Section overview	3.1
	So what is introversion, anyway?	3.2
	Research on introversion/extroversion	3.6
	How these differences play out	3.8
4	A Deeper Look at Introversion	
	Section overview	4.1
	Introversion as an impediment	4.2
	Introversion as an asset	4.3
	How extroverts perceive introverts — positive perceptions	4.5
	How extroverts perceive introverts — negative perceptions	4.7
	Skills that benefit introverts	4.9
5	Working Well Together	
	Section overview	5.1
	How introverts can accommodate extroverts	5.2
	How extroverts can accommodate introverts	5.4
	How introverts and extroverts can accommodate each other	5.6
	How introverts can help themselves	5.7
	S-t-r-e-t-c-h-i-n-g	5.9
6	Related Resources	
	Section overview	6.1
	Related reading	6.2
	Workshop on Introverts and Extroverts in the Workplace	6.3
	Need assistance?	6.4

SECTION 1:

Introduction

Section Overview

This opening section sets the stage by describing the objectives of this Guide, explaining how it came to be, and outlining some terminology that appears in later sections.

Objectives of This Guide

Some questions first:

Introverts: Does your introversion pose challenges for you in succeeding in your current position or advancing in your career? Do you have difficulty inserting yourself into discussions with people who are enthusiastically chatting away? Would you like to better understand your own introversion and the extroversion you encounter in others so that you stand a better chance of attaining your professional goals?

Extroverts: Does the behavior of your introverted co-workers, colleagues and customers confuse, puzzle or frustrate you? Do you ever wonder how to draw introverts out? Do they sometimes seem withdrawn, uninterested and uninvolved? Would you like to better understand introversion so that you can be more effective in managing or working with introverts?

The introvert/extrovert dynamic is a complex one. Introverts and extroverts typically exhibit significant differences in communication patterns, interaction preferences and work styles. These differences can cause confusion and frustration in interacting with each other. Worse, they can lead to misunderstandings, reduced productivity and flawed outcomes.

These challenges are most pronounced in certain professions, such as IT, which has a much higher percentage of introverts than in the general population, while extroverts are represented in much greater numbers among IT customers.

My primary goal in writing this Guide is to support, encourage and inspire my fellow introverts. But my hope is that it will also be of value to extroverts who want to better understand the introverts they interact or work with. My objectives are to:

- ◆ broaden your understanding of both introversion and extroversion, so that you fully appreciate the differences between the two
- ◆ describe how extroverts perceive introverts — both the positive and negative perceptions — and consider what introverts can do to minimize the negative perceptions and maximize the positive ones
- ◆ examine the experiences, challenges, frustrations — and successes — of introverts in an extroverted world
- ◆ consider ways in which introversion is an asset and ways in which it is an impediment
- ◆ identify skills that can help introverts survive and thrive without sacrificing their natural introverted style
- ◆ learn how introverts and extroverts can interact and communicate so that everyone can do their best work

Being an introvert can be a challenge! We live in an extroverted world. We have no choice but to extrovert. If we want to advance at work or simply be seen as a valued contributor in our current position, we need to emerge from our caves and interact. If we keep to ourselves too much and remain overly reserved, we risk being viewed as unengaged, uninterested, lacking in team spirit, unsupportive, etc. (you know the list, I'm sure!).

This Guide is *not* an attempt to present or defend Type theory or to delve into other aspects of our behavior beyond introversion and extroversion. Other authors have done a fine job of addressing these issues (see the Related Reading list at the end), and I refer you to them.

My interest is in the impact of introversion on our work lives; that is, the struggles that many introverts face and what they can do to succeed both despite and because of that introversion. Although my focus is primarily the workplace, you may at times see application to your personal life. If so, great!

I challenge you to not just survive as an introvert, but to excel and if you'd like to, to advance. In reading this Guide, I hope you will come to believe, as I do, that

- A crucial step in surviving as an introvert is to understand what introversion is about and to appreciate the assets and strengths you possess *because* you are an introvert.
- The way to excel as an introvert is to appreciate how others perceive your introversion — both the positive and negative perceptions — and to strive to maximize the positives and reduce or eliminate the negatives.
- The key to advancing as an introvert is to stretch, to try new behaviors, to go beyond your natural introverted tendencies, and to develop the skills that will enable you to achieve your goals.

I wish you success in all these challenges.

Naomi Karten

Terminology Used in this Guide

For starters, I want to clarify some of the terminology you'll see in this Guide.

MBTI

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)¹ is a personality instrument that helps people understand their preference for introversion or extroversion, as well as other aspects of their personality. Unlike many other personality instruments, the MBTI looks at normal differences among healthy individuals, rather than strengths vs. weaknesses or appropriate vs. inappropriate behaviors. As a result, the MBTI can help people understand their own behavior better, as well as how they are similar to or different from others.

In numerous companies, people have had the opportunity to take — or have been required to take — the MBTI. Thus, it is through the MBTI that many people gain their initial understanding of introversion and extroversion.

Extroversion vs. extraversion:

In everyday English, “extroversion” describes people who are outgoing, lively, and talkative. However, in the context of psychological Type, the word is typically spelled “extravert,” going back to its early use in the work of the psychologist Carl Jung.

Strictly speaking, “extroversion” describes external behavior; “extraversion” is concerned with not just external behavior, but also what drives that behavior. Both perspectives are of importance in this Guide. However, since “extrovert” is the spelling most people are familiar with, I have chosen to use this spelling throughout this Guide, except when sources I quote use “extravert” or “extraversion.”

Styles:

In MBTI language, people have a “preference” for introversion or extroversion. Unfortunately, “preference” can come across to people unfamiliar with the MBTI to mean “I like one more than the other,” as in “I prefer kayaking to swimming.” Or “I prefer mushrooms on my pizza, but it's OK if you leave them off.” In this Guide, I try to avoid this confusion by steering away from “preferences.” Instead, I refer to these facets of one's personality as “styles,” as in styles of interacting, styles of communicating, or styles of behaving.

¹ Myers-Briggs Type Indicator™ and MBTI™ are registered trademarks of Consulting Psychologists Press, Palo Alto, California

“Generally,” “typically” and “tends to”:

Although some of the material you may come across on introversion and extroversion suggests otherwise, it is not the case that all introverts or all extroverts behave a certain way, or that either type always behaves a certain way in a given situation. Therefore, in this Guide, I use qualifying words, such “generally,” “typically” and “tends to,” as in “Extroverts generally gain energy when they interact” or “Introverts tend to be reserved.”

These wordings acknowledge that even if a given description fits most of the time, any given introvert or extrovert may behave or react otherwise. As a practical matter, it’s cumbersome to qualify every description with “tends to” or similar wording, so even when I don’t do so, please understand that this qualification is implied.

The Story Behind the Introverted Story

My name is Naomi and I am an introvert.

One of my most powerful recollections as an introvert is an experience I had almost 20 years ago. I was in Minneapolis to speak at a professional association dinner meeting. Prior to the meeting, I'd had several enjoyable conversations with Tammy, the group's program director, and she had offered to show me around town the day of the meeting. There was a store in town, a specialty food emporium, that I'd heard about and thought would be fun to see. Tammy graciously accommodated, and off we went.

The store was quite a place. Shelves and bins and counters and refrigerator cases full of scrumptious-looking taste treats. In my head, lots of reactions were hippety-hopping around. Some, I actually mentioned out loud. "Look at this!" "Oh, wow, this looks delicious!" "Wonder what this is." Reactions like that. But even as we wandered the aisles, I was aware that most of these reactions were quite comfortably ensconced inside my head. On the outside, I wasn't being especially effusive. Effusive? That's hardly a term I'd use to describe myself.

Later on, Tammy made a comment that was probably of no particular consequence to her, but was such a whack in the head for me that I've remembered ever since. She said: "You're hard to know." She said it casually, simply as an observation and not, I'm certain, to inflict pain. But ooh, did that hurt.

It hurt because I knew she was right, and I didn't want to be hard to know. But I didn't have in me the reservoir of energy and bubblyness from which to spew forth. And even if I'd had the energy, I lacked the bottomless pit of yakkety-yakkedness from which to draw. And so, even though we'd had some great conversations and enjoyed some hearty laughs together, she saw me as elusive and distant and inaccessible.

What This Experience Means — and What It Doesn't Mean

Does this experience mean that all introverts lack reservoirs of energy or the ability to talk at length? Not at all. Nor does it mean that I'm not, at times, both energetic and talkative.

To some people, it's obvious that I'm an introvert, or at least that I tend to be reserved. Tammy saw me as being hard to know. Similarly, a casual friend recently asked how I was doing because "you're so quiet, it's hard to know what you're thinking." And I

recall a fellow who, I learned through the grapevine, thought I was a snob because I ignored him when I passed him in the hallway. Actually, I was simply immersed in my own thoughts and barely noticed him. This happens to me often; still, I find the idea that someone might think I'm a snob troubling. Yet I have no doubt that some people see me as remote, uninterested, and unfriendly.

On the other hand, many people see me as an extrovert. These are people who have seen me yakking it up with friends or colleagues. Or they've heard me when I've had lots to say or felt strongly about some issue. Many people who have attended my seminars and presentations have commented on what a high-energy speaker I am (and it's true; I love interacting with an audience and I somehow become transformed into an extroverted introvert). On a day that I was feeling down, a friend asked if I was OK, given how quiet I was. I told him, "I'm always quiet." His response: "Since when?" Another friend who surprised me with a clever quip said it's the first time he'd ever seen me speechless.

Although some of these people mistakenly equate talkativeness and enthusiasm with extroversion, I confess that it pleases me when they see me as an extrovert. But I'm not. I'm a strong introvert. I enjoy — and crave — periods of quiet. I live a good deal of my life in my head, and I can happily spend lengthy periods of time by myself without interacting with the outer world. I like working through ideas on my own before discussing them with anyone else.

I'm not crazy about parties, though I usually enjoy parties where I know and like most of the people attending. But being with people for long periods — even people I like a lot — wears me down. My preferred type of social gathering is with just a few friends, where we can have sustained conversation on this topic or that, rather than the flitting from topic to topic that's so common in a large group.

Cell phones baffle me, or at least all the people who are constantly using their cell phones. Who are all those people talking to all the time? I use my cell phone primarily to keep in touch with clients and to coordinate with people I'm meeting somewhere. Most of the time, though, email suits me just fine. Truly, it should be called I-mail.

At this point, many years since the Tammy incident, I believe I'm much easier to know. Or at least, a lot more of what I used to keep private I'm now more willing to disclose, though even now, I won't share it with just anyone. (And surely, "disclosing" as I use it here, is more likely to be a word introverts use than extroverts). So some people who know me may be surprised by my claim that I'm not effusive, while others would probably assert that I'm still hard to know.

In any case, by now, I know myself better, and I'm comfortable being an introvert. Yet, as much as the easy talkativeness of some of my extroverted friends sometimes

drives me crazy, I also envy them. I wish I could summon that whatever-it-is that enables them to talk-talk-talk, even when there doesn't seem to me to be anything to say! I've often wished I could be an extrovert, just briefly, just to see how it feels. (Perhaps a TV reality show: Extrovert for a Day.) And then I'd like to return to my cave, where things are calm and quiet and I can think about things without the distractions and interruptions of that noisy outer world.

Inevitably, some people are going to find me hard to know, but that's OK. I like who I am, and I've come to appreciate that my introversion has lots of positives that have, in fact, contributed in some important ways to my professional success.

The “Despite” Syndrome

Still, I never would have thought much about how to succeed as an introvert if people hadn't started asking me how *they* could succeed as an introvert. Their asking me wasn't just a coincidence. I've become very interested in the challenges that introverts experience — as well as the challenges experienced by extroverts who are stymied about how to successfully work with, supervise, or communicate with introverts. I've repeatedly seen the frustrations each poses for the other, usually unintentionally, and I've witnessed misunderstandings stemming from differences in when and how introverts and extroverts speak and what they speak about.

As a result of these interests, I incorporated into my Managing Customer Expectations seminar, as well as some of my other seminars, a segment on this introvert/extrovert dynamic. After all, if you want to manage your customers' expectations, you have to be able to communicate with them in ways that foster understanding, and an awareness of introvert/extrovert differences can help you do that. In addition, whenever I give presentations and workshops on the MBTI, the segment on introversion and extroversion invariably generates intense interest.

As soon as I began writing and speaking on this dynamic, I started hearing regularly from introverts who asked me what they need to do to succeed professionally despite being an introvert. They didn't use the word “despite,” but it's clear from the way they asked that they saw their introversion as an impediment, something that got in the way and kept them from being who they wanted to be and doing what they wanted to do.

The first time I was approached about introversion as an obstacle was during a multi-day experiential workshop I was facilitating. When Sue, a woman in the group, asked for some private time with me, we made a date for breakfast. I had anticipated that she wanted feedback on her performance during the previous day's team exercises. But I was wrong. Sue wanted to know how I had managed to be successful as an introvert.

It seems that Sue struggled, as many introverts do, in thinking on her feet and having her ideas heard. She said she wanted to advance into management, yet she was unsure how to get there given her introversion. She grumbled about being unable to quickly summon ideas during heated meetings, amidst extroverted colleagues who never seemed at a loss for ideas to toss out. She saw me as a model for what she wanted to accomplish, and wanted to know what I'd done to get ahead.

Sue's query had an amusing aspect to it. As I explain in my introversion/ extroversion workshops, you can help your introverted colleagues by informing them ahead of time of the topics to be discussed at a meeting. By doing some thinking beforehand, they'll be better able to contribute at the meeting. Yet, here was Sue, asking an introvert how to succeed as an introvert, without giving that introvert any lead time to reflect on the issue. This result was some muttering and sputtering on my part, and a good reminder for me that we introverts can help ourselves by asking for information in advance of a meeting so that we can prepare.

Interestingly, extroverts have never asked me for advice on advancing professionally given their extroversion. Yet, extroverts too experience struggles attributable to their extroversion, and we introverts need to appreciate this. Many extroverted friends and colleagues have enlightened me about ways in which their outgoing personalities create conflicts, get them into trouble, and contribute to awkward or embarrassing situations.

I Stands for Intelligent Introvert

That meeting with Sue was the first time I had been explicitly asked about succeeding as an introvert, but it proved to be just the first of a great many times that I've heard similar concerns, such as:

- The fellow who explained he aspired to be a manager, but wasn't sure he should even consider it, given that he was an introvert.
- The woman who told me, in a whisper during a break in a seminar I was presenting, that she had trouble speaking out in a group setting. I pointed out how often she'd spoken up thus far in this class. She said, "That's because I know these people. But when I'm with people I don't know, I clam up."
- The man who, when no one else was around, told me he can't seem to speak out as effortlessly as others in his company, and he wanted to know if anything was wrong with him.
- The man who told me that his introversion contributed not just to problems at work, but also to his marital problems. Sadly, he's not the only one I've heard from about introversion-related problems at home.

I feel great empathy for these people. They want to advance in their careers. They want to be taken seriously. They want to be — and be seen as — the equal of anyone who can think on their feet. They want to have good relationships with their extroverted colleagues (and life partners). They want to be OK with who they are, while at the same time being free of the constraints they feel their introversion has hobbled them with.

The introverts who have sought my advice have impressed me as intelligent, accomplished, articulate people. Many hold important positions in their organizations; others provide training, consulting or other services to client organizations. Not a dummy among them. And yet the way many of them express their challenges as an introvert communicates stress, uncertainty, self-doubt, even pain.

Hearing their plight, I started thinking about my own career, and realized that while my introversion has posed challenges, some of the things that have helped me advance have been triggered or influenced by that very introversion. Things like presenting my ideas in writing, developing strong presentation skills, learning about personality differences, taking personal and organizational development workshops, and using what I think of as Introverted Marketing in my training and consulting business.

Still, as a student who rarely raised her hand in class and hated being called on, I never could have imagined myself as a professional speaker who has delivered seminars and presentations to more than 100,000 people internationally (and love doing it!). During my years as a programmer, I couldn't even have imagined myself as a manager. Me? No way! (I spent several years as an IT manager.) And certainly, earlier in my career, the very idea of having my own training and consulting business was unthinkable. Amazingly — to me, at least — I've now had this business for more than 20 years.

Looking back, I can now see that in many ways, my introversion has not only not detracted from my professional success, but has contributed to it. I believe that much of what has helped me can help you too. But it takes work, a genuine desire to give it a try, and a willingness to stretch and at times, to be uncomfortable. And it won't always be fun — there are times I'd really rather crawl back into my cave than make a phone call. But for me, the results have been worth the effort. Perhaps, that'll be the case for you too.

I invite you to draw from the ideas and suggestions in this Guide so that you, too, can succeed, excel and advance as an introvert.

(By the way, if it's any consolation, I still hate being called on when I take a class.)

SECTION 2:

Gaining Insight into Yourself and Others

Section Overview

Before delving into a detailed explanation of introversion and extroversion, let's begin with practical realities: what you experience every day at work. In particular, let's focus on your behavior as it pertains to introversion and how it compares with the behavior of others you communicate or interact. This section helps you assess your own behavior and guides you in comparing and discussing key differences with your team-mates and other colleagues so as to identify how you can work together more effectively.

Are You an Introvert or an Extrovert?

Q: How can you tell if a software engineer is outgoing?

A: He looks at your shoes instead of his own.

When I present workshops on Introversion and Extroversion in the Workplace, I start by asking participants how many are certain about whether they are introverts or extroverts. Typically, about 75% of the group is certain, and subsequent discussions usually confirm their certainty.

Most of the remaining 25% experience themselves as sometimes introverted and sometimes extroverted. Often, though, a few people would prefer not to be pinned down as either; their goal is to learn to function better with both introverts and extroverts, an admirable goal. And of course, some people fall into the 25% because they are unfamiliar with what introversion and extroversion are all about.

If you're unsure whether you tend more towards introversion or extroversion, the grid on the next page will help you decide. But even if you're quite certain which you are, how you fill in the grid may offer some insights about the ways in which introverts can differ from other introverts — and extroverts from other extroverts.

Happily, there are NO wrong answers. And there's no time limit in responding. Best of all, there are no points deducted from your final grade if you change your mind at any point, because there's no final grade and you can change your mind at any point.

A key point before proceeding: The intention here is not to label you or pigeonhole you (or anyone else), but to understand the behaviors more commonly associated with each of these types. If your responses in filling in the grid indicate that you are more introverted at certain times and more extroverted at other times, that's fine.

Wait — don't start yet!

Before filling in the grid, make some extra copies, so that you can fill it in from different perspectives, or invite co-workers (or family members) to give it a try.

To fill in the grid:

- ✓ Place a checkmark in the left or right box in each row according to which description sounds more like you.
- ✓ Place the checkmark in the middle if you're not sure which description fits better, or if you see yourself as sometimes veering toward one description and sometimes veering toward the other.

Self-Assessment Grid

	Do You . . . ?	✓	✓	✓	Do You . . . ?
1	Do you tend to be oriented to the outer world of people and things?				Do you tend to be oriented to the inner world of ideas and thoughts?
2	Do you thrive on interaction?				Do you thrive on quiet?
3	Do you gain energy from interacting with others?				Do you lose energy from interacting with others?
4	Do you generally enjoy being with lots of people?				Do you prefer interacting one-to-one and in small groups?
5	Are you generally animated and expressive?				Are you generally reserved and reflective?
6	Do you have numerous close friends?				Do you have a small number of close friends?
7	Do you tend to hear your thoughts for the first time when you say them out loud?				Do you tend to “hear” your thoughts internally before you say them out loud?
8	Do you prefer to develop ideas by speaking out loud and by interacting with others?				Do you prefer to develop ideas alone or with a small number of other people?
9	Do you prefer phone to email for interacting with others?				Do you prefer email to phone for interacting with others?
10	Do you tend to find interruptions by others while you’re speaking energizing?				Do you tend to find interruptions by others while you’re speaking annoying and rude?

Assessing Your Self-Assessment Responses

Now, take a look at your responses. If you have more checkmarks on the left side, you tend towards extroversion. If you have more checkmarks on the right side, you tend towards introversion.

If you have several checkmarks in the center column, as many people do, your reactions to these items might depend on the circumstances. For example:

- ✓ You might thrive on interaction after you've been alone for an extended period and thrive on quiet after a long, rat-on-a-treadmill day at work.
- ✓ You might be animated and expressive when you're with long-time colleagues and reserved and reflective when you're with people you don't know well.
- ✓ You might prefer phone to email when reconnecting with old friends but prefer email to phone when you need to carefully craft what you're going to say.

The nice thing about this grid is that you can respond to it in terms of any number of contexts, and in doing so, you might discover that you respond differently depending on the context. For example:

- ✓ You might respond differently when considering your interactions with your employees, customers or management, or your interactions in professional vs. personal settings.
- ✓ You might reflect on how you would have filled in the grid at different times in your life, such as when you were a young child, a high school student or a first-time employee, or before and after you were promoted or took on some other major challenge.
- ✓ Your responses might also vary with the time of day, the amount of pressure you're experiencing, the length of time since your last vacation (or free hour), or whether you got up on the wrong side of the bed.

According to Type theory, you *are* one or the other. That is, you are either an introvert or an extrovert, but you possess (or can develop) the skills to function as the other. Whether or not you support this theory, it's clear that your behavior is influenced by a great many factors, such as your upbringing, your life experiences, and the freedom you have to (or believe you have) to be who you truly are. As a result, you may legitimately see yourself as sometimes more introverted and sometimes more extroverted.

For purposes of this Guide, I see it as irrelevant whether you view yourself as over-the-top introverted, mildly introverted, or as sometimes introverted and sometimes extroverted. What's important is that you can survive, excel and advance given that introversion.

Now, some introverts would be happiest if they could earn their living in a mountaintop hideaway, with no direct contact with other humanoids except as totally unavoidable (say, you bumped into the snowmobile driver bringing the food you ordered on the Web for delivery to your mountaintop abode). No doubt, most of us can think of times when this sort of existence would seem like heaven. But most introverts work in or with organizations, and what's important is how well your personality meshes with those you interact with and what you can do to make those interactions as positive and fruitful as possible.

Read on . . .

Comparing Yourself with Your Teammates

Do you suppose your teammates or co-workers would respond exactly as you did in filling in the grid? Even not knowing them (or you), I doubt it. Therefore, you might find it instructive to compare your responses with theirs, and see what you make of the similarities or differences.

Give each of them a blank copy of the grid and ask them to fill it in based on how they see themselves. Then compare your results with each other.

In particular:

- How many instances are there of two people with exactly the same pattern of responses? Don't be surprised if there are none. In many of the groups I've worked with, no two people had responses that matched exactly. But the very act of comparing invariably leads to lively conversation, and is the first step in beginning to appreciate similarities and differences in the group, relative to introversion and extroversion.
- How many people placed all their checkmarks in the left or right columns? Often, there are at least a few. These people can be instrumental in helping the others understand their personal experiences as an introvert and extrovert.
- How many people who have a majority of responses in the introverted column also have one or more responses in the extroverted column — and vice versa? It's not uncommon for people who are clearly introverted or extroverted in terms of certain aspects of their behavior to be just the opposite with respect to other aspects — wonderful evidence of what multi-dimensional people we are.
- For which of the ten behaviors listed in the grid (if any) did the majority of respondents check the same box? Discuss how that commonality serves as a strength for the group. Then discuss how it could become (or has become) an impediment, keeping the group from achieving its goals.
- Which of the ten behaviors showed the most variability among respondents? Discuss the implications of this variability. What are the benefits? What are the pitfalls?

How to use what you learn from this comparison

Seeing how responses differ among team members is a good first step in examining how you can work together more effectively — and indeed, how you can benefit from the differences that your responses reveal.

One way to do this is to select an item for which there is noticeable variation among team members, and discuss what you make of this. If you tend towards introversion, this is an opportunity — perhaps your first — to help others understand what being an introvert means for you.

In doing so, you may find, as I often do, that many people misunderstand introversion (including introverts themselves) and misinterpret certain introverted behaviors in unfavorable terms, such as an unwillingness to cooperate or a refusal to participate. Recognize that from the perspective of an extrovert, these interpretations make sense, and this may be the first chance these extroverts have ever had to recognize that the introverted behaviors they've observed have a different explanation.

At the same time, this is also an opportunity to hear from those who are more extroverted about their own experience. Just as extroverts may have misinterpreted your behavior, you may have misinterpreted theirs, and you're now in a position to learn from them.

So, for example, item #2 — thriving on interaction vs. quiet — describes a difference prevalent in many groups. Therefore, you might discuss:

- What does it mean when you say you tend to thrive on interaction (or thrive on quiet)? What behavior might I notice?
- What is it like for you to exhibit that behavior?
- (For those who checked the middle box) What led you to check the middle box? What are some situations in which you prefer interaction vs. quiet?
- When you're thriving on interaction (or on quiet), what kinds of things annoy you? What kinds of behavior in others do you find frustrating?
- What confused or puzzles you about the behavior of those who checked one of the other boxes?
- How do the differences in responses to item #2 become a nuisance or a hindrance?
- How can we take advantage of the differences in responses to this item to work together effectively?
- Given the above, what changes might we make so that we work together in a way that respects and accommodates these differences? What can each of us do differently as individuals? What can we do differently as a team?

SECTION 3:

Understanding Introversion and Extroversion

Section Overview

Introversion can best be understood in context; that is, both what it is in its own right, and what it is relative to extroversion. Accordingly, this section explains both introversion and extroversion, and how the two typically play out in general and in the workplace. This section also describes research that points to significant differences in the brain functioning of introverts and extroverts.

So What Is Introversion, Anyway?

While on a train ride, I overheard four people engaged in lively chatter. No, actually, that's not quite correct. Three of them were soft-spoken and reserved. The fourth, a gregarious conversationalist, dominated the interaction. She caught my attention when she said to one of the others: "You have a lot of ideas for such a quiet person."

What a misconception — that a quiet person lacks ideas! Yet, it's an easy mistake to make. After all, if a person has ideas, that person would spout those ideas, right? Well, not necessarily. In fact, one's verbosity in expressing ideas is no indicator at all of the quantity of one's ideas. What this woman was experiencing, though she didn't realize it, was the difference between her own communication style as an extrovert and that of her three seat-mates, whose behavior suggested they were introverts.

An understanding of what introversion is all about — both on its own and in contrast to extroversion — can prevent you from unintentionally attributing to introversion that which doesn't pertain. But beware: it's not just extroverts who misunderstand introverts. Such is the mystery of introversion that we introverts sometimes misunderstand each other and fall victim to the same misconceptions and stereotypes!

Introversion and extroversion made simple

Introversion and extroversion concern *where we get our energy*. This is important to grasp because it's the key to the differences in behavior between introverts and extroverts:

- Extroverts get their energy from interaction with people and things; the outer world, in other words. Extroverts are energized by interaction and tend to be much more animated and expressive than introverts. They enjoy being with people; many extroverts can talk with people all day long and still look forward to a group gathering in the evening.
- Introverts get their energy internally; much of their communication takes place on the inside, a private place not accessible by others. Thus, they are often less talkative, animated and expressive. Introverts lose energy from interaction. The very process of talking — or even listening — for an extended period depletes an introvert's energy. As a result, introverts have a strong need for Cave Time to recharge.

The impact of this difference in where we get our energy is significant because it influences how we communicate, when we communicate, and what we communicate about. Is it any wonder that we often misunderstand each other?

Consider further:

- Extroverts typically think out loud. All that talking is actually the thought process in action. It's not surprising, therefore, that extroverts sometimes seem to change their minds in mid-sentence as they work through their ideas and draw conclusions.
- Introverts, by contrast, tend to process their thoughts internally before voicing them — if indeed they voice them at all. Introverts often prefer time to reflect before speaking. As a result, they may take longer to respond than extroverts, but may be more articulate when (if!) they do respond; after all, their utterances have been through several rehearsals already.

It's sometimes said, and not entirely in jest, that both introverts and extroverts have an inner life and an outer life: Extroverts have both on the outside; introverts have both on the inside.

Taken to an extreme, introverts look at extroverts and wonder if they'll ever stop yapping, and extroverts look at introverts and wonder if there's anyone at home. Yet, we will get along with each better if we try to understand these differences, respect them, take them into account in our interactions with each other — and find ways to laugh about them together.

But he seems so extroverted . . .

Given these differences, it seems like it ought to be obvious who is an introvert and who is an extrovert. All you have to do is notice their behavior, right? Wrong! Despite these major differences, you might easily conclude that a given person is an introvert — or an extrovert — and be mistaken, because:

- Both introverts and extroverts can be outgoing. Both can be reserved. Both can gain great enjoyment from being with people. And both need quiet time to recharge.
- There are talkative introverts and quiet extroverts, aggressive introverts and shy extroverts, brash introverts and timid extroverts. Under stress, some extroverts become more reserved than usual and some introverts become more talkative.
- In many ways, introverts differ not just from extroverts, but also from their fellow introverts, and the same is true for extroverts. So while we introverts may share certain qualities and attributes, we also differ from each other in numerous ways. As a result, introverts who are particularly reserved may experience more talkative introverts as being extroverted.

- The ways in which we express our introversion vary not only from one person to another, but also from one situation to another. While reserved in certain situations or with certain people, I (and probably you too) can be extremely talkative in other situations or with certain other people.
- The ways in which our introversion expresses itself may change as we gain experience in the world and confidence in ourselves.

Therefore, observable behavior alone may be an insufficient indicator of another person's introversion or extroversion. For that reason, if you're with people you don't know well (or who haven't compared their introversion and extroversion), asking questions can spare you having to play Personality Detective.

For example, ask "Do you need some time to think about this?" Introverts often appreciate not having to respond to an issue in the moment. Extroverts may also appreciate the time, or may find it unnecessary.

Or ask, "Is that your conclusion or are you still considering the issue?" A question of this sort (tailored to the specific situation) can help with both extroverts and introverts. That's because extroverts tend to think out loud so that you're unsure where in the thought process they are. And introverts sometimes pause just long enough between expressed thoughts that you're unsure if they've finished what they're saying.

Introversion and extroversion in context

It's important to keep in mind that the introvert/extrovert dimension is just one small aspect of who we are. In particular:

1. **We are multi-dimensional beings.** Therefore, the way any of us exhibits our introversion or extroversion will be influenced not only by other personality factors, but also by such things as our upbringing, culture, experience, family obligations, work expectations, and past experience.
2. **We are multi-talented beings.** Introverts though we may be, and though we might often wish we could take a time-out from this dizzy-busy world, we are fully capable of extroverting. It's even possible that introverts are better at extroverting (because the outer world requires it of us) than extroverts are at introverting (because there's less external pressure to do so).
3. **Both introverts and extroverts are capable of doing important, complex work.** It wouldn't be surprising, though, if the two prefer to carry out that work differently. Most important: Although there is certainly work that each may prefer not to do, it's a mistake to suggest that there is work that either *can't* do as a consequence of their introversion or extroversion.

4. **Introversion and extroversion are not about skills.** They concern how you behave when you have no pressure hanging over you to behave a certain way. This is sometimes described as your “shoes-off” self; how you behave when you don’t need to accommodate the expectations of others. Skills, on the other hand, are things you can acquire. If you choose to, you can develop skills that enable you to function in a more extroverted manner.
5. **Introversion and extroversion are not about air-time.** If we could add up the time introverts and extroverts spend talking, we’d undoubtedly find that extroverts account for the majority of the talking time. And extroverts would undoubtedly win a word-count competition. But it’s a mistake to conclude from any given person’s bout of talkativeness or silence that the person is or is not an introvert.
6. **How our introversion or extroversion display themselves vary.** They vary not only from one person to another, but also from one situation to another. And any of us, though introverted, might differ in how that introversion expresses itself at different times of the day (or week or month or whatever) — and at different times in our lives.
7. **Differences exist not just between extroverts and introverts, but also *between introverts and between extroverts*.** As noted previously, any two introverts or extroverts can behave in ways that are just as different from each other as the behavior of any introvert and extrovert. This is not only because of all the factors that influence introversion and extroversion, but also because both introversion and extroversion themselves represent a range of behaviors which interact to influence our behavior.
8. **Watch out for stereotypes.** Stereotypes about introversion and extroversion can do damage because they thwart understanding. One such stereotype, for example, is that introverts don’t like parties and extroverts *do* like parties. At times, both are true. But introverts often enjoy parties, especially when they know other party-goers. And whether extroverts will enjoy a particular party depends on many things, and the things it depends on vary from one extrovert to another. Many extroverts are no more comfortable than introverts at approaching strangers at a social event and inserting themselves into the conversations going on around them.

Research on Introversion/Extroversion

I used to kid about whether someone might someday invent a thingamabob that could measure the increase in energy that extroverts experience and the loss in energy that introverts experience in interacting with others. Although we don't yet have such a measuring device, we're getting closer, because research is pointing to very real, and most likely inborn, differences between introverts and extroverts.

In particular, a lot of brain research is being conducted regarding the brain pathways associated with introversion and extroversion.

Note, for example, the research described in [The Introvert Advantage: How to Thrive in an Extrovert World](#) by Marti Olsen Laney, Ph.D. (Workman Publishing, 2002, p. 69-72). This research involved people identified as introverts and extroverts via personality questionnaires. When these individuals were lying down and relaxed, scanning equipment was used to detect the parts of the brain that were most active, as determined by the amount of blood flow to that part of the brain.

First, introverts had *more* blood flow to their brains than extroverts. More blood flow indicates more internal stimulation. . . . Second, the introverts' and extroverts' blood traveled along different pathways

It seems that in introverts, blood flowed via a long, complex pathway to the parts of the brain that come into play with internal experiences such as problem solving, planning and remembering. By contrast, the extroverts' blood flowed via a short, less complicated pathway to areas of the brain that comes into play in visual, auditory, touch and taste sensory processing.

But that's not all. Not only does the blood of introverts and extroverts flow along different pathways; in addition, these pathways require different neurotransmitters. Dopamine, which is a neurotransmitter involved in states of alertness, learning, and movement, is required in just the right amounts. Neither too much nor too little is good. Too much can cause hallucinations and paranoia. Too little can result in inattention and lack of concentration.

Now here's the thing: Extroverts require lots of dopamine. And how do they get it? Through activity, which results in adrenaline being released from the action of the sympathetic nervous system to make more dopamine. The more active the extrovert, the more dopamine the brain makes.

And introverts?

Introverts, on the other hand, are highly sensitive to dopamine. Too much dopamine and they feel overstimulated.

Which suggests that when extroverts become energized by interaction with others and introverts become fatigued — it's the dopamine at work.

In introverts, the key neurotransmitter is not dopamine, but acetylcholine. This is a neurotransmitter involved in numerous brain and body functions such as sleeping and dreaming. Most important in this context, however, acetylcholine influences the ability to sustain a calm, alert feeling. In short, it helps us feel good. So, in order to feel calm and relaxed, introverts require just the right amount of dopamine (neither too much nor too little) and just the right level of acetylcholine to achieve a feeling of well-being.

It's all in your head . . .

I find these research findings both reassuring and exciting. It's reassuring that at least part of the explanation for introverted behavior is that we're wired to be that way. In other words, what's going on in our brains helps to explain our tendency to reflect before speaking, to be more reserved than our extroverted counterparts, to lose energy through sustained interaction, and to need quiet time to recharge.

And I find it exciting to know that while our behavior may sometimes come across as a willful withholding of information, that's not the case at all. Indeed, to the extent that intentionality is involved, both introverts and extroverts are as likely to be guilty of withholding information.

This research is still in its infancy, and lots more is certain to be found that will further explain the differences in behavior between introverts and extroverts. In the meantime, it's vital that we view our "wiring" as an explanation, not an excuse. Introverts though we may be, we are fully capable of developing the skills or adjusting our behavior so as to be successful in extroverted contexts. The choice is ours.

How These Differences Play Out

The two charts that follow describe some of most common observable differences between introverts and extroverts.

The chart on **Familiar Differences between Introverted and Extroverted Behavior** summarizes common differences you're likely to notice between introverts and extroverts both in and outside the workplace. And actually, once you recognize introversion and extroversion as pertaining to where we get our energy, these differences make sense.

The chart that follows, concerning **Differences You May Notice at Work**, describes differences in behavior that you might experience or observe in doing your job.

As you review these charts, consider how they reflect your own tendencies and the similarities and differences between yourself and those you frequently interact and communicate with.

Familiar Differences between Introverted and Extroverted Behavior

Although these tendencies don't apply to all introverts and extroverts all the time, they do seem to hold true for introverts and extroverts in general. As you examine this chart, reflect on your own behavior, and notice the striking differences between the behavior of introverts and extroverts.

	Extroverts Tend To . . .	Introverts Tend To . . .
1	Be oriented to the outer world of people and things	Be oriented to the inner world of thoughts, ideas and feelings
2	Seek stimulation from the outer world	Seek stimulation from the inner world
3	Reach understanding through interaction and discussion with others	Reach understanding through quiet reflection
4	Gain energy through interacting with others	Lose energy through interacting with others (even just listening)
5	Enjoy action and variety	Enjoy concentration and quiet reflection
6	Act, then think, then act	Think, then act, then think
7	Think out loud, hearing their thoughts for the first time when they speak them	Refine, edit, revise, and "rehearse" their thoughts before speaking them
8	Be self-disclosing, sometimes readily revealing personal information to others	Be private, often withholding personal information from all but a select few
9	Be animated and expressive	Be reserved and reflective
10	Prefer to communicate in spoken form (especially face-to-face) than in writing	Prefer to communicate in writing than in spoken form
11	Enjoy interaction in large groups	Prefer interacting one-on-one or in small groups
12	Prefer to attend a party than stay home alone and read a book	Prefer to stay home alone and read a book than attend a party
13	Need occasional quiet time to recharge, especially after a demanding schedule	Need frequent quiet to recharge, and may suffer if they don't get it
14	Often find it energizing and enjoyable for people to stop by while they're working	Usually find it disruptive or distracting for people to stop by while they're working
15	Enjoy solving problems by brainstorming with others	Enjoy solving problems alone or with input from selected others

Exceptions to the Rule

As you scanned this chart, I thought I heard a few echoes of “yeah, but” as you thought of ways in which one or another item in the introverted column doesn’t describe your behavior. But if some of the descriptions don’t apply to you, that’s fine. There’s plenty of room for differences among the differences.

For example, despite being an introvert, in certain types of situations I’m animated and expressive. Not as animated and expressive as many extroverts are (or at least, not for as long or as persistently), but I still feel these terms do at times apply to me. Similarly, at times, I thrive on action and variety. I often find brainstorming invigorating and fun. And I certainly, at times, hear my words for the first time as I say them, and sometimes they even make sense when I do this. I’m certain you too can think of examples in which your behavior fits nicely into the extroverted side of the chart.

Furthermore, both introverts and extroverts have told me of situations in which the behaviors described in this chart are inaccurate because of the context. For example, although extroverts are more likely than introverts to enjoy interaction in large groups, it’s those very groups that make extroverts sometimes wish for fewer people. Why? Because in a large group, extroverts may have to compete for air time with other extroverts. As a result, extroverts sometimes prefer to interact in a small group which offers more opportunities to have their say (or a large group in which most of the others are introverts).

Conversely, although introverts are more likely than extroverts to prefer interacting one-on-one or in small groups, too small a group may put pressure on introverts to speak up when they prefer to remain silent. So in a three-person team in which all three happen to be introverts, each team member may feel pressured to keep things going, with none of them having extroverted energy to drive their interactions.

Differences You May Notice at Work

The differences described in the preceding chart can certainly affect the behavior of introverts and extroverts in the workplace and the interactions between them. As the chart below suggests, these differences have a bearing on how we go about forging relationships, carrying out projects, coping with challenges and change, seeking buy-in, and selling ideas. Here are some differences to be on the lookout for in your workplace.

	In This Context	Extroverts Tend To . . .	Introverts Tend To . . .
1	General work style	Seek opportunities to interact with others, ideally in person	Prefer working alone, involving others (if at all) only after clarifying their own ideas
2	In communicating vital information	Prefer to communicate in person, rather than in writing	Prefer to communicate in writing, rather than in person
3	Speaking style	Speak at length, often presenting many ideas at a time	Speak deliberately and present ideas in a coherent, orderly fashion
4	In meetings	Speak up early and often	Speak up (if at all) after thinking, reflecting and observing
5	As a member of a team or group	Let others know what they think, even if not asked	Remain reserved about what they think until asked
6	In coping with change	Seek ideas from as many others as possible and display eagerness to act	Seek ideas primarily from close colleagues and make decisions in a deliberate manner
7	During problem solving	Enjoy rapid-fire methods such as brainstorming for surfacing ideas about the problem	Enjoy pondering problems alone or with just a few others and reflecting on the ideas generated
8	In resolving conflict	Readily express thoughts, concerns and feelings, often preferring to address issues now rather than later	Seek private time to reflect on issues, often preferring to address them later rather than sooner
9	Regarding social activities	Enjoy interacting with co-workers at birthday parties, lunch, after-work gatherings, and the like	Prefer to limit or skip social occasions such as birthday parties, lunch, after-work gatherings, and the like

SECTION 4:

A Deeper Look at Introversion

Section Overview

This section explores introversion further, examining it in terms of both its positive and negative attributes (as viewed by both introverts and extroverts), and considering what this information suggests about ways to excel given these attributes.

Introversion as an Impediment

When I talk to people about their introversion, their focus is almost always on the impediments they feel their introversion poses. When they describe the challenges they face as a result of their introversion, here's what they emphasize:

- They say they feel drowned out by their more talkative colleagues, especially in meetings.
- They explain they don't know how to present ideas so they'll be heard.
- They complain of feeling drained by the constant interaction that their work entails.
- They don't enjoy the social interactions that seem necessary for advancement.
- Although they aspire to become a manager, they wonder if it's a mistake.
- They ask if there's anything wrong with them, because they can't seem to speak up as readily as some of their co-workers.
- They describe professional problems in getting along with colleagues and personal problems in sustaining relationships with spouses, partners and kids. (A few have described divorces that they attribute at least partly to conflicts between their introversion and their spouse's extroversion.)

So, is introversion an impediment? In some ways, definitely. The world is an extroverted place, and functioning in this outer world isn't as effortless or enjoyable as we might wish. But there's nothing about introversion that poses insurmountable impediments to a successful career — or a happy life. Anything worth achieving takes effort. Introverts must resist seeing themselves as victims.

An I'm an introvert, woe is me attitude is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Impediments: not for introverts alone

Do *not* assume that only introverts face impediments, or that extroverts don't face struggles and challenges attributable to their extroversion. When I've made this point in my introverts-only workshops, some have insisted it can't be true. But according to my extroverted friends and colleagues, it's their very outgoingness and their process of thinking out loud that poses challenges, gets them into trouble, and at times contributes to uncomfortable or embarrassing situations.

Introversion as an Asset

I've encountered very few introverts who describe their introversion as an asset or who appreciate the strengths they have *because* of their introversion. Often, it's not until I suggest the possibility that introversion can be a source of strength, if not an outright advantage, that they realize the positives that their introversion affords.

When I've asked groups of introverts to consider the ways in which their introversion is an asset, here are the sorts of things they've come up with:

- Glue: we hold things together
- We're good at offering options to an issue under discussion.
- We can concentrate on one thing for an extended period.
- We're really good listeners. We don't interrupt each other; we listen to each other respectfully.
- We have the ability to take notes and report out. In fact, taking notes in a meeting can put us in a position of power, since the person who takes notes to some extent "controls" what actually happened.
- Self-reliance: we're good at depending on ourselves to get things done.
- We enjoy reflection and introspection.
- We're good at working through ideas.
- We're easy to be with.
- We don't need to depend on others to do our best thinking.
- We're comfortable spending extended time alone.
- We work well with other introverts.
- We make wonderful friends.
- When we feel anxious or nervous, it's not necessarily obvious to others.
- Our ideas are tested before we express them.
- If I say something, I'm willing to stand by it.
- We are a calming influence.

- Compared with extroverts, we're less constrained by the outer world in forming ideas.
- We think faster and get to the answer faster.
- We think things through before making a decision.
- We're easily amused, with little need for external stimulation.
- We can occupy our minds. Boredom is not an issue.
- We don't interrupt each other as much as extroverts do.

If you want to excel as an introvert, start by recognizing the strengths *you* have by virtue of your introversion. Be aware that many of the items on this list are things that extroverts wish they too had as strengths. For example, I've talked with extroverts who say they wish they could rely on themselves more and be less dependent on the input, feedback, and stimulation provided by others. And as the next page emphasizes, your strengths include the positive perceptions extroverts have of you.

How Extroverts Perceive Introverts: Positive Perceptions

In order to excel in an extroverted world, it's essential to understand how extroverts experience and perceive introverts' behavior. If you assume that all such perceptions are negative, you're wrong. Happily, extroverts see many positives in the behavior of their introverted colleagues. In fact, they sometimes see positives in us that we don't see in ourselves.

When I've talked with extroverts about things about introverts that they appreciate, admire, envy, etc., the following observations come up repeatedly:

- Powerful thinkers, think more deeply
- Detail-oriented
- More focused
- Comments – when made – have more impact
- Good analytical skills
- More confident in solving problems solo
- Articulate in presenting their ideas
- A calm and calming influence
- Great listeners
- Able to keep their head on straight in the midst of chaos
- They keep me grounded when I'd otherwise go off in too many directions.
- They may not say much, but when they talk, they're worth listening to!

As you read this list, you may have certain reactions, such as “What????”

For example, when I first learned that many extroverts saw me as presenting a calm demeanor in tense situations, I thought, “But my insides were playing hopscotch!” How can they see me as calm when I'm in such a state of upheaval?

But I came to realize that there a difference between what they see on the outside and what I'm feeling on the inside. In unsettled situations, extroverts see me as someone they can count on to remain stable and steadfast. And knowing how widespread this perception is of introverts as a calming influence, I can use it to my advantage — and so can you.

Another example. I told an extroverted friend a comment I'd heard: that from the perspective of many extroverts, introverts are often very articulate when they *do* speak. His immediate response, "That's not true!" I was confused. "You mean introverts *aren't* articulate when they speak?" I asked. "Just the reverse," he told me, "They are *always* very articulate."

Now I, for one, don't always feel articulate. Babbleheadedness is sometimes more like it. But judging from how often extroverts have commented to me about the articulateness of introverts, I now see this as a prevalent perception. And that's another significant plus, and one you can exploit.

So whether or not I see myself as a powerful, detail-oriented, focused, analytical, articulate thinker, if that's how extroverts perceive me, my job is not to refute these perceptions, but to use them to my advantage.

Now, take another look at this list of positive perceptions. Notice how you react to each perception and consider what it might suggest about how you come across to your extroverted colleagues.

How Extroverts Perceive Introverts – Negative Perceptions

Granted, not all the perceptions are positive. And this list of negative perceptions is longer than the list of positive perceptions. But concealed within every one of these negative perceptions is information about what we might do differently, if we so choose, to transform potentially negative perceptions into positive ones.

When I've asked extroverts to describe things about introverts that annoy them, frustrate them, and make it difficult for them to deal with us, here's what they say:

- We don't know where they stand. We don't know (can't see) their thought processes.
- Not very collaborative / don't seem to like generating ideas in teams
- Don't seem very social/connected to “outer world” events
- Get to the point already!
- Sometimes, it's hard to tell if anyone's at home!
- Often wonder: Are they (the introverts) judging me?
- Speed difference in speaking (introverts speak more slowly)
- Pace of conversation is too slow.
- Introverts need to flee to recharge.
- They don't seem to like people very much.
- Deliberately withholding ideas or important information
- Uninvolved, uninterested, non-participative
- Making minimal contributions to team efforts
- Putting everything in writing instead of just picking up the phone
- They're unfriendly . . . aloof . . . distant . . . cold . . . remote, etc.
- “Running away” – not wanting to interact
- They don't like being interrupted.
- They seem trapped inside their shell.
- I don't know how to draw them out.

This list can be hard to take. But if we're going to accept the positive perceptions, then we have to acknowledge the negative perceptions as well. We have to recognize that even if some (or all) of the entries in this list represent serious misunderstandings of you, they are accurate representations of how extroverts see you. Their perceptions are their reality even when they don't match your reality.

Happily, transforming these negative perceptions into positives doesn't require a personality transplant. In fact, some very small changes can have a big impact. Things like occasionally venturing outside your cubicle to drop in on a teammate, tossing an

idea or two into a brainstorming session, or explaining that you'd like some time to reflect on an issue (rather than remaining silent or just departing).

The sounds of silence

A key observation that I've made based on conversations with many extroverts is that silence can be intimidating, mysterious, suspicious, worrisome, and downright unnerving. *Our* silence, that is. In many work situations, such as team interactions, our reserved manner and prolonged periods of quiet are very uncomfortable for many extroverts. Because their own tendency is to give voice to their thoughts, they see our behavior as deliberate and motivated. That read into our behavior what's not there. They don't appreciate that our behavior, for us, is just as natural as theirs is for them.

If you like the idea that you may be conveying these negative impressions, and you're willing to accept the risks of doing so, then there's no need to do anything differently. Otherwise, consider piping up more often (and hope that in response, some of the more talkative extroverts will pipe down a little). Not every utterance has to be an original thought; you can affirm the ideas that others have offered, or offer follow-up questions, such as, "Great idea!" or "Are you sure about that?" or "Should we also consider (whatever)"? Inserting yourself just occasionally into the interaction may be just enough to avoid being seen as suspiciously silent.

Even just smiling occasionally — or showing any other facial expression — when communicating with extroverts can (according to several extroverts I've talked with) give them the "feedback" they seek in interacting with others.

Skills That Benefit Introverts

OK, we are the way we are because we are that way. And we don't want to change who we are. But we're fully capable of developing skills that will help us function with comfort and confidence in this extroverted world — without sacrificing our natural introverted orientation. Here are some skills you might want to develop or learn more about:

	Skill	Benefit
1	Facilitation	Be seen as a take-charge person capable of overseeing and managing group dynamics in meetings and problem-solving sessions.
2	Presentation skills	Gain credibility and clout as someone proficient at delivering presentations and in speaking out meetings and other group gatherings.
3	Thinking on your feet skills	Learn how to respond quickly, in the moment, without needing a time-out to reflect.
4	Writing skills	Learn to write in a persuasive, attention-grabbing way so powerfully communicates your ideas.
5	Conversational skills	Become fluent in initiating and participating in conversations — including becoming more open to being interrupted and to interrupting others (when with extroverts who enjoy being interrupted)
6	Influencing, persuasion and sales skills	Become skilled at putting forth a proposal, recommendation, or idea and have it be acknowledged, considered, and acted on.
7	Interpersonal skills	Become more poised and fluent in getting along with others.
8	Relationship/networking skills	Become comfortable in initiating, maintaining and strengthening connections with others.
9	Information-gathering skills	Gain expertise in asking the right questions and asking the questions right.
10	Awareness skills	Develop a deeper understanding of your introversion and become more aware of how you come across to others.

Building Your Own Set of Skills

Which of these skills jumps out at you as one you'd like to work on as a starting point? Every one of them might represent a stretch, but at the same time, any one of them is an important step, particularly if you want to advance in your career. And you're certainly not limited to this list. You can add any skill you want to if you see it as helping you address your introversion challenges.

For many people, creating a list of skills to be developed — or even just considering the possibility of developing certain skills — represents a “way out,” a way to feel they are in control, rather than bearing the weight of their introversion as a relentless burden.

Writing and Speaking as My Own Key Skills

For myself, it's the writing and presentation skills that have most directly and most significantly contributed to my own success. As an IT manager, I was the memo champion of the 12th floor. When I had a case I wanted to make or an idea I wanted to advance, I put it in writing, whether the intended recipient was my own manager or a wider audience. And I worked hard at being fluent in reports I prepared in conjunction with special projects I was assigned.

Although I didn't know it at the time, these writings impressed a lot of higher-ups and enhanced my reputation, all the more so (I suspect) because so many others in the organization wrote poorly. I didn't always succeed in winning support for my ideas, but the very fact that I submitted them was tangible proof that I was actively thinking about ways to improve the organization.

Submitting my ideas in writing was not the outcome of a debate over spoken vs. written. It was what came naturally to me. I never would have advanced these ideas in spoken form, which would have necessitated defending them on the spot, something I didn't feel competent to do. In any case, I believe that ideas presented in written form have a longer shelf life; they don't fall victim to interruptions and distractions, and they're less likely to get buried, lost, stomped on, or interrupted by the recipient(s).

Writing has remained my primary communication tool and my way to get my ideas out there. When I formed my own business 20+ years ago, I began to write articles for business and trade publications and continue to actively do so, with the addition now of articles for my own website and other websites. And these writings, along with the newsletters, books, handbooks and guides I've now written, have helped me build my reputation in a manner that supports my introversion.

Presentation skills have also figured heavily in my ability to face the world as an introvert. In my years in IT, I did everything I could both to avoid giving presentations and to avoid learning *how* to give presentations. When the company held public speaking classes, I sent the people in my department. Each time the course came around I sent someone else, the better to avoid facing it myself. And when all of them had taken it, I started sending them to take it again as a refresher. Anything to avoid going myself.

Fortunately (very fortunately, in retrospect), I eventually realized that I needed to face up to it. There'd been talk of promoting me into management and I knew I had to overcome my trepidations about presenting. I took a couple of adult ed classes and discovered that I had the knack. Not the confidence — not yet — but definitely a smattering of capability. That was the start.

When I formed my business, I realized that speaking at conferences would help me create name recognition. Nervousness was my middle name in those first few presentations, but I gradually developed the technical skill and the comfort level to use speaking as a key marketing method. Presentations and training soon became key components of my business, leading to opportunities to present keynotes and seminars internationally. Whodathunkit?

Becoming a professional speaker may not be in your game plan, but the ability to give a presentation at a company meeting or conference can do wonders for your credibility. Delivering a presentation is an opportunity to share your insights, convey valuable information, and gain a reputation as an expert in your topic. Like any other skill, improving takes work, time, and lots practice. But the more you do, the better you get at it and the more self-confidence you develop.

When I'm giving a presentation, I feel extroverted, and thrive on interacting with the audience. Some people unfamiliar with introversion might mistake me for an extrovert. But I'm not. I just become energized by the act of presenting.

Supplementing my writing and speaking skills are interpersonal skills that serve me well. The simple things have impact out of proportion to what it takes to do them: smiling or showing some other facial expression when interacting with others, empathizing, being a good listener, asking questions, asking if I can have a few moments (or a day) to reflect on an issue before responding to a question — and trying to remember to acknowledge a friend or colleague whom I pass in the hall.

That last one, I'm not so good at. But I usually realize moments later that I goofed and may have given the wrong impression, so I try to be more alert next time.

SECTION 5:

Working Well Together

Section Overview

This section suggests specific actions, attitudes, behaviors and techniques that can help introverts and extroverts work together effectively.

How Introverts Can Accommodate Extroverts

Introverts who are willing to accommodate the behavior of extroverts by taking steps such as the following will be much more effective in interacting, communicating and working with them.

Note: You don't have to enjoy doing these things; *you just have to do them*. Some of them may be awkward or unpleasant at first, but as you gain experience, you may find that your skill at working with extroverts has improved. For example:

1. Like it or not, accept that extroverts tend to think out loud. Appreciate that this is truly how they process ideas.
2. Given that extroverts think out loud, don't take everything they say as their final thought. If you're not sure if something they've said is a conclusion, ask "Can you tell me if that's your conclusion, or is it an idea you're still working on?" If possible, talk openly about the fact that they process their ideas out loud and you're unsure how to know when they've reached a decision; doing so enables you to establish signals that work for both of you.
3. Show "signs of life" when others (whether extroverted or introverted) are speaking to you, such as a smile, a nod, a question, a comment, or a response — even if the response is only that you need more time before you can respond further. These signs of life demonstrate that you are involved and interested.
4. In managing a group that includes extroverts, provide opportunities for the extroverts to interact with others. Don't expect them to be happy doing the bulk of their work alone or without talking with others.
5. When talking with extroverts, aim at least occasionally to respond more quickly with less pausing to think. It may not always be comfortable to do so, but these "speedy" responses will give extroverts the feedback that they find so essential in communicating with others.
6. Be more forthcoming in offering information; don't always wait till you're asked. Tossing an occasional idea into a brainstorming session or a meeting contributes to the session and enables others to see you as actively engaged and interested in what's transpiring.
7. Listen persuasively. Don't become so immersed in processing what you just heard and thinking about what you're going to say next that you miss what's being said *now*.

8. Let extroverts know that you need time to reflect before responding. Most extroverts don't realize that you have this need, and by telling them, you'll be giving them something to know rather than something to fume about (or to misinterpret).
9. Make it your responsibility to occasionally step outside the cave, such as by telephoning or dropping in on an extroverted colleague. Doing this even infrequently will demonstrate your willingness to interact with them.
10. When working with extroverts, use brainstorming as at least one method of generating ideas, even though it may not be your preferred approach.
11. Build relationships one person at a time. Schedule brief get-togethers with your extroverted colleagues (and your introverted colleagues, for that matter) and get to know them. Ultimately, who you know that will be instrumental in what you are able to accomplish.

How Extroverts Can Accommodate Introverts

Extroverts who are willing to accommodate the behavior of introverts by taking steps such as the following will be much more effective in interacting, communicating and working with them.

As with the previous list for introverts, if you're an extrovert, you don't have to enjoy doing these things; *you just have to do them*. Some of them may be awkward or unpleasant at first, but as you gain experience, you may find that your skill at working with introverts has improved. For example:

1. Like it or not, accept that introverts tend to be reserved and reflective. Appreciate that this is truly how they process ideas.
2. Provide written information in advance of a gathering. By giving introverts the opportunity to review the material beforehand, you will enable them to be better prepared to actively participate during the meeting.
3. Whether or not information can be sent out in advance, provide an agenda at the start of the meeting to enable introverts to start processing in advance.
4. Allow time for introverts to get to know you. They may take longer to “warm up” to a relationship than extroverts do.
5. Accept that most introverts won't disclose personal information early in a relationship — and perhaps not at all except in close relationships.
6. Don't wait for introverts to offer ideas; ask them. Draw them out. You may find that many of them have a lot to say; they are just waiting to be asked. But do *not* confront them with “You haven't said anything yet” which may prove awkward and embarrassing. A simple, “Do you have any thoughts on this?” is often enough to do the trick. Or even just, “Does anyone else have anything to offer?”
7. Allow time for introverts to work through their ideas before they respond. Go a step further and explicitly ask: “Would you like some time to think it over?”
8. Guard against “taking over.” If you want to hear what introverts have to say, give them an opportunity to voice their thoughts. A well-run meeting or discussion ensures that everyone — both extroverts and introverts — have the opportunity to contribute.
9. When you are thinking out loud, tell introverts that you are doing so, so they don't mistake your thoughts for decisions. Explicitly tell them: “I'm thinking out loud; when I've reached a conclusion, I'll say so.”

10. In managing a group that includes introverts, allow opportunities for the introverts to work alone. Don't expect them to be happy doing the bulk of their work in groups.
11. Allow breaks or periods of quiet time during times of intense interaction. Even just a few minutes of downtime periodically can make a big difference in the ability of introverts to maintain the pace. Few situations are so critical that they can't accommodate these minor breaks.
12. Where urgent decisions are not called for, allow introverts to follow up with their ideas after a meeting or brainstorming session. Go a step further and tell them, "I know some of you may have additional ideas later on. Be sure to forward them to me when you do" — or provide a deadline. (The opportunity for follow-up is useful for extroverts too.)
13. Communicate occasionally in written form even if you'd prefer to do so in spoken form.
14. In idea-generating sessions, use post-it notes and index cards so introverts (and extroverts) have a route for offering ideas even if not speaking out. In fact, you can deliberately alternate between brainstorming techniques, which appeals to extroverts, with written forms of capturing ideas, which appeals to introverts.
15. Listen persuasively. Don't become so eager to jump in with your own ideas that you miss what the introverts are saying. And watch out for facial expressions and body language that suggest you can't wait to speak.
16. Recognize that introverts tend to be uncomfortable interrupting others, so pause occasionally and allow them to "gain entry" to offer their ideas.
17. Anticipate that introverts may pause as they speak, so give them time to complete what they're saying before jumping in. If you're not sure they've finished, ask: "I'm not sure if you're done. Is there more you'd like to add?"
18. Balance interactive methods of generating ideas with reflective methods, such as by interspersing active segments of a meeting with quiet periods for reflecting on a given idea.

How Introverts and Extroverts Can Accommodate Each Other

What's most important is how we get along with each other, regardless of whether any of us are introverts or extroverts. Therefore:

- ▶ Early in your work with others, explain your communication and work style as it relates to introversion and extroversion, inquire about theirs, and discuss how your style and theirs are similar or different.
- ▶ Collaborate about how you can work together in a way that maintains respect for their style — and your own.
- ▶ Give each other permission to raise concerns about how you are communicating and getting along so that you can make adjustments in support of your relationship and your goals.

How Introverts Can Help Themselves

Ultimately, you are in charge of yourself, and no one can help you the way you can help yourself. If you want to survive, excel and advance as an introvert, here are some things to keep in mind:

1. Just put it out there! Dare to just speak out occasionally without taking the time to do the internal processing first. It may feel uncomfortable at first (it *is* uncomfortable at first), but you will probably come across as far more coherent than you give yourself credit for.
2. Be willing to offer a little more of yourself in interactions with extroverts. The more you do it, the easier it will become. And a little more may not require all that much. It's a matter of intending to do a bit more, and then doing it.
3. When you know you're going to be in an extroverted setting for an extended period, try to take extra time beforehand to rest up. This is especially important at successively high levels of management. Pace yourself. Consciously try to avoid a situation of overload. It's *not* selfish to take quiet time for yourself.
4. Use simple techniques that will help you behave in a more extroverted manner. For example, make notes during discussions and use them in commenting. Jotting down a few thoughts may make it possible to express ideas articulately without needing as much time for reflection beforehand.
5. Build relationships one person at a time. You don't have to be everywhere, interacting with everyone all the time. An old Chinese proverb says that many littles make a much. Dropping by someone's office, sending an occasional email "just to see how you're doing," or occasionally scheduling a lunch date with key individuals will help you to build alliances, give and gain support, and build a reputation as someone people know and trust.
6. Develop skills that will give you the confidence and competence to function in ways that demonstrate that you have something of value to contribute. Instead of worrying whether you're capable of handling the next level up, create a plan to build the skills that will serve you well whether or not you move up. When you can deliver a compelling, persuasive presentation to management or wow them with your written proposal, they won't care that you're an introvert. They'll see you as a valuable contributor.
7. Use humor about your introversion. The differences between introverts and extroverts are fun to laugh about, especially when you can be open and playful about them. I kid my extroverted friends about competing for the gold in the Yakkety-yakathon. They tease me about not knowing which end of the phone you talk into. (Phone? Talk?)

8. Recognize your strengths as an introvert and appreciate the positive perceptions extroverts have of introverts. You already have more going for you than you may realize.
9. If you start feeling sorry for yourself as an introvert, STOP and focus on what you now know about introversion *and* extroversion and how you can use this information to help you succeed *because* you are an introvert.
10. Ask for what you need, whether it's more time to reflect on an issue, a time-out in a brainstorming session, a different way of holding meetings, or anything else. You'll be speaking up for yourself *and* helping your more extroverted colleagues better understand how to work with you. In the process, you'll gain the appreciation and respect of the other introverts in your midst who don't know how to express what they need or don't have the courage to do so.
11. Talk with other introverts. By email, of course, if that's your preference. Whatever your experience as an introvert, you are most definitely not alone. In certain contexts, such as IT departments and software teams, you are most likely in the majority. Compare your experiences, concerns and frustrations and discuss what changes on your part or on the part of others would help you be more effective without sacrificing your introverted style. Then do something with what you come up with (see #10).
12. At all times, remember the importance of self-care. Being an introvert in an extroverted world takes a toll. Remain mindful of the need to take care of yourself. As they say on planes, first put the oxygen mask on yourself before putting it on the person next to you. Do what you need to so that you can bring the best of yourself to your work — and all other aspects of your life.

S-t-r-e-t-c-h-i-n-g

Remember, you're not trying to change who you are. There's nothing wrong with who you are! What you're trying to do is develop skills and behaviors that enable you to achieve your professional goals.

Obviously, this is not an overnight process. The first time you try any new or modified behavior, it's likely to feel awkward, and that may be the case the second and third time as well. But that temporary period of discomfort and incompetence is the price you pay to acquire almost any new skill. Therefore, the best approach is to anticipate that awkwardness and recognize it as a normal stage of growth. Be gentle with yourself. Allow for flubs and flaws. Don't expect perfection of yourself, or even anything close to it. Maintain a sense of humor. Recognize and appreciate the progress you're making.

You may find that the ways in which you have to stretch to advance as an introvert are within your power and are worth the price. The manager I mentioned earlier in the Guide who questioned whether he should become a manager because of his introversion did go on to become a manager. According to several people in his department, he's an excellent manager. In my opinion, his introversion has not only not detracted from his success, but has contributed to it because he's an excellent listener, gives each individual one-on-one time, and publicizes their successes — all things that introverts can excel at.

Alternatively, you may find, as some people do, that what you need to do to advance as an introvert is too fatiguing, too troublesome, or just plain too extroverted. For example, relationship building becomes ever more important at successfully higher levels of the organization, and the amount of people contact may be more energy-zapping than you can (or want to) handle. If so, you can choose other directions. Or you can craft approaches that let you succeed with a minimum of stretching.

I hope this Guide has helped you broaden your understanding of introversion. Good luck and please keep me posted!

Naomi

SECTION 6:

Related Resources

Section Overview

This section includes a list of related reading and a description of my workshop on Introversion and Extroversion.

Related Reading

Bennet, E.A. **What Jung Really Said**. New York: Schocken Books, 1983

Hirsh, Sandra Krebs. **Work It Out: Clues for Solving People Problems at Work**. Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black Publishing, 1996.

Hirsh, Sandra Krebs and Jean Kummerow: **Life Types: Understand Yourself and Make the Most of Who You Are**. NY, NY: Warner Books, 1989.

Karten, Naomi. **Communication Gaps and How to Close Them**. New York: Dorset House Publishing, 2002.

Karten, Naomi. **Perceptions & Realities** newsletter. Posted for downloading at <http://www.nkarten.com/newslet.html>.

Keirse, David and Marilyn Bates. **Please Understand Me: Character & Temperament Types**. Del Mar, CA: Prometheus Nemesis Books Co., 1984.

Kroeger, Otto with Janet M. Thuesen. **Type Talk at Work: How the 16 Personality Types Determine Your Success on the Job**. New York: Dell Publishing, 1992.

Laney, Marti Olsen. **The Introvert Advantage: How to Thrive in an Extrovert World**. NY, NY: Workman Publishing Co, Inc., 2002.

Lawrence, Gordon. **People Types & Tiger Stripes**. Gainesville, FL: Center for Applications of Psychological Type, Inc., 1997.

Murray, William D.G., **Give Yourself the Unfair Advantage! A Serious Practical Guide to Understanding Human Personality That Will Have You Rolling in the Aisles**. Gladwynne, PA: Type & Temperament, 1995.

Myers, Isabel Briggs & Peter B. Myers. **Gifts Differing: Understanding Personality Types**. Palo Alto, CA: CPP Books, 1993.

Pearman, Roger R. and Sarah C. Albritton. **I'm Not Crazy, I'm Just Not You: Secrets to How We Can Be So Alike When We're So Different**. Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black Publishing, 1997.

Rufus, Anneli. **Party of One: The Loners' Manifesto**. NY, NY: Marlow & Co., 2003.

Introverts and Extroverts in the Workplace

Here is a description of my workshop:

The introvert/extrovert dynamic is a complex one. Introverts and extroverts typically exhibit significant differences in behavior, interaction preferences and work style. And the two often differ in what, when, and how they communicate.

In the software/IT profession, and a variety of other professions, these differences pose challenges because introverts are represented out of proportion to their numbers in the general population, yet a large proportion of their customers and management (and, of course, some of their teammates) are extroverts. Such differences often lead to frayed nerves and ruffled feathers. Worse, they can create misunderstandings, reduced productivity and flawed results.

This workshop is for anyone who would like to learn how to work effectively with their more introverted or extroverted colleagues. We'll take both a serious and a light-hearted look at the introvert/extrovert dynamic, so as to:

- Broaden the understanding each has of the other
- Dispel misconceptions and stereotypes
- Understand positive and negative perceptions each has of the other
- Determine what each would most appreciate from the other
- Examine tools and techniques for working together productively

This workshop is especially effective for intact teams and other groups that need to interact, communicate and collaborate in order to achieve a goal or deliver a result.

Need assistance???

If you would like an in-house workshop on Introverts and Extroverts in the Workplace or some coaching support to help you survive, excel and advance as an introvert (or an extrovert), contact me and let's discuss the options.

Good luck! ☺

Naomi

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