

## **The Introvert Advantage (And what we all can learn from it)**

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According to Otto Kroeger and co-authors of *Type Talk at Work*, extroverts in America outnumber introverts three to one. The dance of doing business is, in a number of ways, built on this unbalanced reality. We have networking events, dinners for schmoozing with strangers, and large holiday parties.

For extroverts, attending large events serves as an energizing force. For introverts, attending the same large events exerts an energy drain. For many introverts, such events are also a source of anticipatory dread and at least some anxiety.

This is not to say that introverts are poor conversationalists. Rather, introverts are, by definition, most comfortable in small groups and one-on-one conversations.

Given that the dance of doing business often involves large-group events, it may seem at first glance that introverts are at a decided disadvantage—that the success that comes with charisma belongs to the outgoing and flamboyant among us.

Ultimately, the perception of charisma is a sense that lingers after an encounter (or a series of encounters) is over. It involves much more than an initial event. In fact, a person who is at ease at large events is not necessarily the one who leaves the best impression over time. For example, think of the following:

- Talkative doesn't automatically equal engaging.
- A person who is the "life of the party" may be entertaining, but that person may also be self-absorbed.
- Mouthy is not a synonym for magnetic.
- A person who is "happy go lucky" can suffer from "out of sight, out of mind."

Viewed from this vantage point, introverts actually have an advantage at large business events. Introverts who have converted their natural tendencies to advantage have internalized the following advice.

### **Plan for Conversations**

Many extroverts, because they talk easily and comfortably with others, attend business functions without planning. They rely on their conversational skills to carry them through. At the end of an event, the extrovert can usually look back on pleasant encounters. At the same time, the extrovert may also look back on missed opportunities due to lack of planning.

An introvert, who is less comfortable with spontaneous small talk, may plan for a conversation, even for a cocktail party. A conversationally-skilled introvert may be inclined

to read a website about an association, a company, a new technological development, the host, the speaker, or even the location of a conference, as a way of preparing for a dreaded large-scale business event.

While introverts and extroverts have equally rich thought-lives, the introvert may be more prepared to bring that knowledge to bear on a particular situation, simply because she plans. Thus, an introvert may be perceived as a more engaging conversationalist than her extroverted colleague.

### **Strive for a High Listen/Talk Ratio**

A friend of mine described one talkative individual as “a person who never had an unspoken thought.” Chances are you know a person like this. That person is at the extreme extroverted end of the introvert/extrovert continuum.

By nature, extroverts are prone to explore ideas by talking. Extroverts like to bounce ideas around, out loud, with others. Introverts, on the other hand, generally prefer to explore ideas internally and remain silent until ready to voice their conclusions. A common complaint from introverts is that a meeting moved too quickly, and that it wasn’t until after the meeting ended that the introvert was ready to make his contribution.

While this situation can make for some meeting-frustration for both the introverts and extroverts involved, if handled wisely, the introvert has an advantage.

- Because an introvert does not have a high urge to talk, the skill of listening comes relatively easy.
- An introvert has a higher probability than her extroverted peer to be described in this way: She doesn’t say much, but when she talks, people listen.
- An introvert finds it easier than his extroverted peer to follow this advice for salespeople: During a sales call, make it your goal to get the customer to do 80% of the talking. This is how you learn the customer’s priorities.

### **Be Fastidious about Follow-up**

Effective follow-up isn’t necessarily instinctive to anyone, introverted or extroverted. It is, however, a crucial skill in any business situation.

Because introverts seek out quiet-time to re-charge their batteries after a large-group encounter, they may have a natural “space” in which to identify items for follow-up. Because they are naturally reflective, introverts may find it easier to create post-meeting action plans than extroverts do.

Both introverts and extroverts, of course, can be faithful about sending a thank-you note or e-mail. The introvert, however, may genuinely enjoy making that note contain a thought-provoking comment that reflects back on a conversation or event. The introvert may find the creative challenge of including a relevant article or web link to be naturally rewarding. This kind of follow-up leaves a lasting impression of charisma.

What Can We Learn from the Introvert Advantage?

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From the angle of this article, introverts have a communication advantage. To be fair, only introverts with communication savvy have learned the skills to convert their natural tendencies toward the advantage described here. Of course, many extroverts learn the same skills. Anyone can make a choice to plan for conversations, strive for a high listen/talk ratio, and maintain a habit of fastidious follow-up.

Effectiveness at these skills requires conscious choice, discipline, and practice. These qualities are introvert/extrovert-neutral. Whether you are naturally reserved or naturally gregarious, you can learn from the introvert advantage. Make the choice today to make this advantage your own!

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