

How to Get the Best From Introverts and Extroverts

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It's time to work on YOU. So sit back and listen to practical, actionable advice to accelerate your progress.

Manager Shah attended a Team-Building Day, hoping for an "easy day to chat with my colleagues, participate in a few activities, and do a bit of bonding with my team."

This didn't prove to be the case. Shah explains:

The day was mainly made up of us working in small groups, completing simple 'fun' tasks against the clock. For one activity, we were presented with a jigsaw to complete within a set time. We were given three goes, and all group members were to take an active part.

What happened during this task turned out to be a lightbulb moment for Shah. The group had five minutes to plan their strategy before completing the challenge.

It was a bit embarrassing. Although we did discuss a strategy and elect someone to lead the team, it soon turned into mayhem. The most extroverted people in the group took over. They shouted over one another with more and more ideas of how it should be done. The strategy went out of the window, and on one occasion, the elected leader ended up in tears.

Taking a step back from the task, Shah noticed that Laura, a quieter member, had withdrawn from the activity and seemed to find the situation amusing. Feeling a bit annoyed, Shah asked Laura what she had found funny:

*She told me straight: "Sometimes you had a clear strategy, and sometimes you didn't. Where there **was** one, you didn't follow it, you all talked over each other, and you never asked the quieter people in the group for their ideas. In fact, it was chaos."*

While Shah was aware of what Laura told him, he was taken aback - he had underestimated **her** talents. Shah explains:

I had seen Laura as a safe pair of hands on the team. A rather quiet person whose opinion I would not actively seek out. I had never asked her to take the lead on anything.

This experience led Shah to reconsider how he managed **all** members of his team. How could he tap into the potential of the introverts and how to stop the extroverts from taking over every time - while keeping them enthused?

Swiss psychologist Carl Jung introduced the concept of introversion and extraversion in 1921. [1]

Jung described a continuum, with these two personality types at opposite ends of the scale. His theory supposes that no one is 100% one or the other. Instead, we all possess traits from both ends of the spectrum while tending to lean one way or the other. Jung did acknowledge a third category - those with an equal number of characteristics from both sides, who would be described by Edmund S. Conklin in 1923 as ambiverts. Ambivert has the same Latin etymology but means 'to turn to both sides.'

According to the Myers-Briggs Foundation [2], 56.8% of us prefer introversion to extroversion. It's curious, then, that 9/10 people in the UK feel pressured to behave in an extroverted way. Why do we prefer introversion and yet encourage extroversion?

To try and get a better understanding, let's have a closer look at the two opposing personality types, starting with introversion.

Introverts tend to find being around people draining, and they recharge by being alone. They keep their public image separate from their private image, they're shy around others, and they keep few close friends. In large gatherings, they think carefully before speaking, taking time to consider all possibilities. Introverts also prefer to observe and can concentrate without being distracted for long periods. Often, they contain their emotions, sometimes to their own detriment.

In contrast, the extrovert's energy comes from social interactions. Their public and private images are very similar. They're very sociable, and they find it relatively easy to make friends. An extrovert would speak their mind in almost any situation, including in large groups. They tend to think out loud and are often driven by their emotions, which can sometimes make them prone to rash decisions. They are, however, capable of building great relationships quickly, and more confident to speak publicly.

Clearly, traits of both introverts and extroverts have real value in the workplace. But are we guilty of giving more recognition and value to the extroverts on our teams?

Susan Cain, self-declared introvert and author of *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking* [3], thinks so. She tells us that it was in the 20th Century that "men of action became preferred over men of contemplation." Magnetism and charisma, characteristics most common in extroverts, have become more valued than the characteristics of introverts. Despite this, Cain tells us:

When given the freedom to be themselves, [introverts] are the most likely to come up with well-thought-out ideas and solutions to problems.

Cain also points out that introverts *will* speak out or act when they feel something important must be said or done. So how can we more harmoniously manage our teams - drawing out the introverts and getting the extroverts to listen more often? Cain says that

We are now at a point in corporate culture where it has become socially acceptable to talk about this for good reason. Introversion and extroversion go to the heart of who a person is: how they work, how they live, and how they interact.

Francesca Gino, a professor at Harvard Business School, advises approaching the managerial challenge [4] from a "mindset of understanding and curiosity." We can begin by educating ourselves about our team members' diverse personality types and working styles. Gino advises us:

Understanding these preferences will help you become a keen observer of the people who are part of your team and what drives them.

Ask individuals open questions such as "What sort of space do you need to work effectively?" and "How much preparation time would you like before a meeting?" Cambridge Network suggests that "you can have a bit of fun in this area, engaging Myers-Briggs profiling and organizing workshops—on communication styles, for instance. These team-building activities could bring a bit of formal understanding to their differences." [5] Once you understand your team members' diverse personality traits and preferences, think about how to manage them successfully.

Here are some ways you can create an environment that will make the most of your team's strengths and personality traits while ensuring that everyone's needs are met.

TIPS TO SUPPORT INTROVERTS

- Share **agendas in advance of meetings**. Tell individuals about items you would particularly like their input on so that they have time to think and prepare their contributions.

- Consider holding some smaller, more focused meetings and one-to-one sessions.
- Use **written responses to some questions** – writing ideas down on post-it notes to be shared on a whiteboard ensures that everyone's views are heard.
- Encourage them to speak up - once the more extroverted people have given their opinions, ask introverts directly what they think. Take care, however, not to push them into the limelight if it's unnecessary and undesired.
- Respect silence. Introverts listen carefully and need time to consider and reflect before responding.
- Make sure your workplace is suitable – introverts need a quiet space to work in. If your workspace is open plan, consider introducing quiet zones. Avoid disturbing them while they are engrossed in their work where possible, and give them time to recharge after a conversation or meeting.
- Be tactful and understanding about their need for privacy.
- Give thorough answers and detailed explanations for tasks.
- Discourage negative feedback from other members of the team. Discussing why something may not work is fine, but teasing or personal critiques will put introverts off from contributing in the future.
- Encourage them out of their comfort zone – offer training in areas they may find challenging, such as networking and public speaking.

AND TIPS TO SUPPORT THE EXTROVERTS

- Encourage their passion and enthusiasm for their work. They love problem-solving, and you need their ideas for solution-orientated discussions. Take care, however – just because extroverts are confident about sharing their ideas, it does not necessarily follow that their ideas are the best!
- Make sure they have plenty of opportunities to work in groups. Extroverts thrive in an environment where they can bounce ideas around.
- Motivate them by showing them your appreciation. Extroverts weigh external motivation and reward cues more strongly than introverts.
- Extroverts can be brilliant networkers and perform well in sales meetings. They can quickly build rapport with strangers and can think on their feet. Recognise this strength - if you need immediate input, the extrovert is the ideal person to go to
- Make sure there is space for people to gather and work together and for random encounters such as space to eat lunch and chat.
- Coach your extroverts to listen to the introverts – ask them to actively involve the more introverted members of the team and to listen to their ideas and views without interrupting or speaking over them. Explain that this is not a criticism. Instead, it's a recognition of the team's diversity of styles and ideas.

So, we've discussed the differences between introversion and extroversion, as well as their strengths and weaknesses. We've gone through some actionable tips to support people on both sides of the spectrum. Your challenge this week is to speak to your team and get a handle on where they'd place themselves on Jung's continuum. Apply

what you've discovered to make introverts and extroverts more comfortable, and you will be recognized as an emotionally intelligent leader who people respect and want to work for.

That's all for today. Thanks for listening, and remember: keep building the best you.

[1] *Psychological Types*, Carl Jung (1921/23)

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Psychological-Types-Routledge-Classics-Carl/dp/1138687421>

[2] *Introverts and Leadership - World Introvert Day*, Melissa Summer (2020)

<https://www.themyersbriggs.com/en-US/Connect-with-us/Blog/2020/January/World-Introvert-Day-2020>

[3] *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, Susan Cain, Penguin (2013)

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Quiet-Power-Introverts-World-Talking/dp/0141029196>

[4] *How to Be Good at Managing Both Introverts and Extroverts*, Rebecca Knight (2015)

<https://hbr.org/2015/11/how-to-be-good-at-managing-both-introverts-and-extroverts>

[5] *Managing introverts and extroverts in the workplace*, Cambridge Network, posted by HR Dept (2021)

<https://www.cambridgenetwork.co.uk/news/managing-introverts-and-extroverts-workplace>