

SUMMARY

QUIET

**The Power of Introverts
in a World That Can't Stop Talking**

Susan Cain



Summary of Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking by Susan Cain

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A revolutionary book detailing how society vastly underestimates introverts and teaches us what introverts and extroverts can learn from one another.



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Introduction

In today's world, we have two types of people. Introverts and extroverts. On the surface, society views extroversion as the ideal, they are social, outgoing, and thrive as leaders and in positions of power. Introverts, on the other hand, are seen as socially awkward, quiet, and shy away from leadership and power. But why does society value extroverts over introverts? For centuries, business leaders of the western world have been seen as domineering, bold, and making rash decisions. However, as Susan Cain presents, extroverted leaders have their downfalls as well. In today's world, it's important to recognize the differences in the two temperaments, and it's even more important to understand one another.

Find out the history of the rise of the extroverted leader, see how other cultures have drastically different personality ideals, and finally, learn how both introverts and extroverts can come together to recognize their true potential.

The Rise and Myth of the Charismatic Leader

When you meet a new person, how do you determine their personality? Depending on the encounter, you're likely to figure out if a person is either introverted or extroverted. While extroverted people tend to be outgoing, gregarious, and enjoy the attention, introverts are more reserved, calm, and quiet. While you may not be able to determine this personality trait after just one meeting, it certainly becomes a critical factor in describing a person's disposition and character. And in today's society, one of these traits is certainly more valued than the other. But was society always this way? When did Western society begin to associate extroversion with success and likability, and introversion with skepticism and unfriendliness?

In the early 1900s, Americans valued the serious, honorable, and disciplined character. Historian Warren Susman defines this era as the Culture of Character but this culture quickly began to shift in the early twentieth century when Americans began a Culture of Personality. This new culture focused on people valuing how they were perceived by others and emphasized likability and charisma as a critical quality of successful people. By the 1920s, self-help books began flying off the shelves influencing men to sell themselves by being outgoing, likable, and dominant whereas women were taught to project charisma and personal magnetism to attract men. These ideas were then pushed on the masses through marketing strategies that capitalized on people's insecurities and anxieties. For example, the shaving cream campaign from the 1930s that warned consumers "CRITICAL EYES ARE SIZING YOU UP RIGHT NOW."

Even worse, experts began to target shy children and warned parents about the dangers of not addressing or "fixing" the problem. Parents were advised to start sending their children to school at younger ages and encouraging gregarious, social behaviors. Additionally, colleges began seeking "well-rounded" candidates who were both academically smart and socially adept. Wishing to prepare students for the business world which praised charismatic dominant personalities, institutions became skeptical of the

“brilliant loner types” who were increasingly seen as “unprepared” for the real world.

Institutions like Harvard Business School (HBS) are largely driven by the idea that leadership and dominance are strong correlations. For instance, students of HBS are expected to engage with their peers at all times whether they are participating in study groups, eating lunch, or even attending parties and hanging at the bar. Students that don't participate in such activities are met with skepticism and suspicion; however, this Extrovert Idea has largely been disproven through successful introverted individuals including Bill Gates, Charles Schwab, and Brenda Barnes. Additionally, Craig Newmark, the founder of the website Craigslist, is also a self-proclaimed introvert who is far more interested in activities like chess versus making conversation.

At the end of the day, charismatic leadership is simply a myth. For the last century, society has largely believed that to be successful, you have to be domineering, gregarious, and charismatic; however, in the past few decades, we have seen successful men and women who exhibit introverted behaviors disprove this previous Extrovert Ideal.

The Power of Soft Power

While the western world has developed its own Extrovert Ideal, each part of the world has their own version of what the ideal personality looks like. The eastern side of the world has a strikingly different attitude towards what they consider the cultural norm. In fact, while westerners value domineering and bold personalities, Asian and Asian-Americans have what Cain considers “soft power” to define their ideal personality.

Take the public school system in Cupertino, California for instance. Ironically, many white families have been moving away from the area due to the increase in competitive academics and the fear that many of their children cannot compete with the high number of Asian and Asian American students. In fact, the students at Cupertino are so focused on academics that the typical social hierarchy of the school looks far different from many other schools throughout the USA. While many schools have a more socially driven environment, Cupertino’s environment certainly revolves around academics and studies. This is partly due to the Asian influence whose culture values quiet study and respect of authority.

Researcher Robert McCrae documented the cultural differences between western and eastern society, noting that Asian cultures valued introverted styles of communication and leadership. The biggest barrier comes from Asian borns who try to succeed in the business world of American companies. Throughout several interviews with Asian-born and Asian-American business professionals, Cain states that many are aware of the striking cultural differences. But many agreed that one style of leadership was neither worse nor better than the other.

Instead, Preston Ni, a communications professor, argues that many people can adapt to the style that the western countries have adopted, but there are certainly several other styles of leadership that are just as successful. Styles such as soft power offer a sense of kindness, respect, and quiet persistence that is not typically seen throughout their western counterparts. Some of

the greatest leaders in the world, like Mother Theresa and Gandhi, are both representatives of people who have successfully used soft power to lead others and change the world.

The Power of Working Alone

If society largely believes that extroversion correlates with success, then how is it that introverts like Bill Gates who founded Microsoft and Steve Wozniak who co-founded Apple, Inc. were able to create some of the most successful businesses seen today? Large corporations, institutions, and schools are emphasizing the concept of “New Groupthink,” which highlights the importance of group dynamics to improve creativity and innovation; however, author Susan Cain believes the power of working alone is critical for brainstorming ideas and increasing productivity.

For example, in Steve Wozniak’s memoir, Wozniak insists that his moments of working alone were the catalysts that contributed to his most important creative breakthroughs. Introverted individuals are likely to be more creative than those who are extroverted, but the key to unlocking that successful innovation is through periods of solitude where an introvert can concentrate more effectively. For instance, when trying to hone your skills in an area of interest, how do you master that skill? Through practice, right? You incorporate deliberate practice where you spend time concentrating and fine-tuning your skills individually. With fewer distractions, you are far more likely to improve in solitude versus being put in a group.

Additionally, Cain proves that two is no better than one. As a society, we’ve largely emphasized that two heads are better than one, that collaboration is key in fostering creativity and innovation. However, group scenarios can become more harmful than successful. For instance, when placed in a group, introverts are more likely to become insecure in their ideas and fear judgment for speaking out. In fact, many group scenarios affect the perceptions of other group members as they adopt the dominant member’s ideas, completely negating the purpose of group collaboration.

While face-to-face collaborations certainly have their time and place, Cain suggests that we become our best when we combine the benefits of

collaboration and independent work rather than immediately defaulting to Groupthink tactics. Giving people the flexibility to opt-out of social or private work allows them to maximize their productivity and recognize which scenarios they are likely to thrive in. Many successful corporations have adopted this kind of work environment like Pixar Animation Studios and Microsoft Headquarters.

The Orchid Hypothesis

Which affects our personalities more? Nature or Nurture? Some believe that our genetics influence our personalities more while others believe our environment is largely more influential. You see, we all thrive in different environments. Some of us thrive on the energy of a loud concert surrounded by thousands of people with ear-shattering music, while others gain energy when in the quietness of their own house with their nose in a book. These environments are drastically different, but some people might find a loud concert synonymous with torture whereas some find that the quietness of their own home drives them crazy. Well, our brains might be largely responsible for this stark dichotomy.

Developmental psychologist, Jerome Kagan, sought to find out why people have such striking differences. To do this, he exposed 500 infants to certain stimuli and analyzed their reactions. These stimuli included smelling alcohol-soaked cotton swabs while simultaneously listening to the sound of popping balloons. The results showed two distinct behaviors: 20 percent of infants reacted to the stimulus by kicking and screaming and experienced a rise in blood pressure. These infants fell into the highly-reactive category while 40 percent of infants fell into a low-reactive category, where they hardly reacted to the stimulus at all and remained calm and cool throughout the experiment.

Kagan predicted that the highly reactive infants would grow up to be more introverted while those who had a calm demeanor would be more extroverted. His theory then argued that the cause of such reactions was largely controlled by the part of the brain known as the amygdala. The amygdala is the first place to receive stimulus from our sensory organs and determines our reactions to that stimulus. The infants who fell into the highly-reactive category have a sensitive amygdala, which leads to a particularly strong reaction from external stimuli. This is why certain people prefer low-stimulation surroundings such as the quiet of their home or the library. So while nature certainly plays a role in our personality, our

environment can become critical in developing the personalities in children as well.

For instance, extroverted children will seek out extra stimuli so they are more apt to take risks. Unfortunately, children in poorer neighborhoods with fewer opportunities are more likely to engage in delinquent activities. But despite this increase in delinquency, extroverted children can still thrive in all kinds of environments. However, the environment of introverted children can profoundly affect them due to their increased sensitivity. This leads to the “orchid hypothesis” in which introverted children will flourish in the right environment, but in the wrong environment, they will shut down or close up completely.

Researcher Stephen Suomi suggests that those with higher sensitivities spend more time observing and reflecting on social behaviors and dynamics. This is why in a nurturing environment, introverted children have the opportunity to practice their social skills and become self-confident, well-rounded adults; however, in an overstimulated or pressured environment, those same children are likely to develop depression or respiratory disorders. So when it comes to nature versus nurture, they each play an equally significant role in developing the personalities of our children.

Introverted Versus Extroverted Leaders

So which type of personality trait is best for fostering a productive work environment? Is one better than the other? Many people might think that extroverted personalities are more likely to “get things done” due to their domineering disposition while introverted personalities are seen as meek and lack the power and authority to motivate their employees. Well, in an attempt to prove these theories, a group of scientists asked teams to do a simple task: fold a T-shirt. Of course, each team was assigned either an introverted or extroverted leader to provide guidance.

While extroverted team leaders were certainly successful in providing clear instruction and getting their team members to adhere to the rules, they were less likely to respond to individuals’ suggestions. For instance, some team members tried to make suggestions on how to make the T-shirt folding process quicker and more efficient, but team leaders were more focused on following the rules. On the other hand, introverted team leaders showed the exact opposite. While their calm demeanor hindered their ability to encourage their team’s productivity, they were more receptive to suggestions which led to utilizing their team member’s ideas.

So what can be learned from this experiment? Well, extroverted leaders are best when the end goal is to complete simple tasks as efficiently as possible; however, introverted leaders are ideal for places where team members need to get involved and put in their own input.

However, the differences don’t stop there. In fact, the difference between extroverted and introverted leaders can be directly linked to many of the financial troubles that banks faced during the 2008 financial crisis. Because extroverts are more likely to take risks and make quick decisions, these types of leaders were valued in the financial world. In fact, cautious investors were actively passed over for promotions because they were less likely to make such high-risk decisions. However, these corporations would

soon feel the effects of such risky investments once the financial bubble burst in 2008.

While many companies paid for their high-risk investments, companies with introverted leaders found themselves thriving during the 2008 crash. For instance, Seth Klarman, the president of the hedge fund, Baupost Group, took a more risk-aware approach to investments and ended up doubling the assets of Baupost. Through reflection and thorough consideration, companies like Baupost were able to avoid a financial crash, therefore, it literally paid to be an introvert during the Great Recession.

When to Be More Extroverted

While introverted investors got paid during the financial crisis, there are certainly going to be times where an introvert will need to step out of their comfort zone. Retired psychology professor, Brian Little, contributed to the “Free Trait Theory” which suggests that although our personality traits are relatively a combination of biological and cultural forces, we can change our personality to be more successful in certain environments. For instance, when a goal becomes highly achievable to us, such as achieving career goals or finding success in relationships, then even our most stable personality traits become changed by adopting these free traits.

But how can one do this? How can an introverted team member step out of their shell and make a strong presentation? How can an introverted professor instill the love of learning in their students? While adopting these free traits can certainly work, Cain also suggests that some people adopt a “self-monitoring” behavior in which they mimic the behavior of other personalities when necessary.

For instance, a college professor can switch from introvert mode to extrovert mode by adopting behaviors of other extroverted professors. So during her lecture, she might project her voice louder, speak more clearly, take longer strides as she walks in the classroom, and then maintain a relaxed posture throughout the duration of her lecture. In the end, the professor accomplishes her goal. She can teach her students the material they need as well as foster their love of the subject. At the end of the day though, the professor needs to fill up her energy levels again as acting extroverted is both exhausting and tiresome. So, she will probably retreat to her office or into the corner of the library away from social interaction to fill up her depleted energy.

Cooperation of Temperaments

By now you probably are relating to one personality or another, you realize that you are either more extroverted or introverted. Do extroverted people struggle to understand the other, and vice versa? Many times they do. For instance, when put in stressful situations, extroverts will tend to become more hostile or aggressive while introverts shrink back and retreat to safety elsewhere. They thrive on different energies and this can result in a lack of communication or an easy misunderstanding. However, while introverts and extroverts are vastly different, there are many ways in which introverts and extroverts have come together and brought their respective strengths to the forefront for the betterment of society.

Take, for example, Eleanor and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Eleanor was well-known for her serious, shy personality while Franklin was an outgoing, bold socialite who thrived at parties and social events. Eleanor, however, thrived on serious conversations and would leave those parties and social events as early as possible. However, the two achieved great things together. Since Eleanor was more understanding and sensitive, like an introvert, she was able to shed light on issues like poverty and oppression of minorities that her boisterous counterpart may not have been aware of.

For instance, in 1939 when Eleanor found out the black singer, Marion Anderson, was not allowed to perform in Constitution Hall, she immediately took action. She was able to utilize Franklin's political clout with her own social conscience and ensure that Marion Anderson would perform in front of Lincoln Memorial on Easter Sunday. The two temperaments can accomplish great things, but it's important to know how to communicate with one another.

The case of Greg and Emily shows how communication is key when two people share opposite temperaments. Since Greg is incredibly extroverted, he enjoys throwing dinner parties every Friday night while his partner, Emily, fears the dreadful Friday night get-together. Their differences in

personality caused many fights and conflicts since the two couldn't understand one another. However, after direct confrontation and healthy communication, the two were able to come up with a compromise to keep both people happy. The two agreed to do bi-weekly parties, and Greg even agreed to change the dynamic of the dinner. What was once a sit-down dinner would now become buffet-style, allowing Emily to have more intimate conversations with smaller groups of people.

Understanding how people of the opposite disposition approach social interactions is key to getting along with one another. By addressing the other's needs for relaxation or social interactions can facilitate smoother relationships in all areas, be it romantic, professional, or familial.

Final Summary

There are many differences between extroverted and introverted people. While extroverts enjoy loud noise and need stimuli, introverts prefer quietness that allows them to be alone and with their thoughts. Additionally, introverts tend to be far more sensitive to their environment and retreat when exposed to stressful situations. For this reason, extroverts have been valued by western society for the past century. Believing that extroverts can get things done more efficiently, these personality types have thrived in western society, especially in the business world. But, as Cain proves, neither is better nor worse than the other. Instead, each has its own strengths that can be utilized both professionally and personally. Cain points out the many business leaders of America who were introverts and suggests that companies stop catering their company culture to extroverts. With Groupthink strategies and an emphasis on collaboration, introverts are failing to live up to their fullest potential. Instead, western culture thrives most when the strengths of each temperament are addressed. So, through recognition, communication, and cooperation, both introverts and extroverts can thrive and survive in the western world.



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