

SUMMARY

THE GENIUS OF OPPOSITES

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Summary of “The Genius of Opposites” by Jennifer B. Kahnweiler

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The Genius of Opposites (2015) provides a refreshing new take on the old saying “opposites attract” and invites us to consider the innovative partnerships that can be forged when introverts and extroverts learn to work together.

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Introduction

Would you describe yourself as an introvert or an extrovert? If you're not sure, it's worth taking the time to figure it out because understanding which end of this spectrum you identify with can have a huge impact on your personal and professional success! In fact, your success just might be determined by the opportunity to partner up with someone on the opposite end of the spectrum! Although you might think it would be easier to work with someone who's just like you, this summary will show you how the old adage "opposites attract" can actually lead to remarkable innovation. So, keep reading, because in this summary, you'll learn:

- Why opposites attract
- How to tell whether you're an introvert or an extrovert
- How the right partnership can revolutionize an industry

Overcoming Your Differences Can Lead to Great Things

You've probably heard that people are either extroverts or introverts, but could you accurately define what those differences mean? Because contrary to the popular misconception, there's more to it than some people preferring to spend more time alone. Instead, it's all about the way you recharge. For example, if after going to a party, you feel the need to retreat into yourself and spend some time alone in order to really feel like yourself again, you're probably an introvert. But if you attend that same party and find yourself infused with energy and feeling like you never want the fun to end, you're probably an extrovert. The simplest way to understand those differences is that introverts draw their energy from within while extroverts need external sources like interaction with others.

Because of this fundamental difference in their relation to the world, it's unsurprising that introverts and extroverts might not always get along. A lot of misunderstandings can occur, with introverts perceiving their more outgoing counterparts as shallow and attention-seeking while extroverts might misunderstand an introvert's reserved nature for being snobby or aloof. These misperceptions often mean that people miss out on potentially vibrant partnerships that could celebrate their differences. And because one person's weakness can showcase another's strength, amazing things can happen when we learn to join forces and build each other up. So, in the next few chapters, we'll take an in-depth look at how introverts and extroverts can learn to team up.

Define Your Differences and Discover Commonalities

You might say that putting introverts and extroverts together is like mixing oil and water, and you're right-- just like mixing oil and water, it's totally doable if you know the right tricks! So, start by assessing the dynamics of your partnership with a series of questions similar to what you'd find on a personality test. Provide each other with statements like, "I can intuit how a person is feeling based on their body language," and "I feel comfortable meeting new people," or, "I feel comfortable working closely with clients whose values differ from mine." You can rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with these statements on a scale ranging from "never" to "almost always." This will help you identify the problem areas where you have the most contrast and work to improve them.

So, how do you work through these personality clashes? Well, Kahnweiler recommends following what she calls "the ABCDE method." Using this acronym as a guide, you can learn to: Accept the alien, Bring on the battle, Cast the character, Destroy the dislike, and understand that Each can't offer everything. These five steps will help you to unlock the genius of opposites through some simple practices that we'll look at in greater detail in the next few chapters. But before we move on, it's important to identify one more thing that's crucial to the success of any partnership and that's sharing a long-term, concrete goal. The ability to unite over a common goal is the glue that holds partnerships of opposites together; without it, you'll be torn apart by your differences.

That's what Steve Jobs (an extrovert) and Steve Wozniack (an introvert) learned through the course of their legendary partnership. Because although they were incredibly different and often struggled to get along, they were united in their goal of bringing computers to the public. So, no matter how much their personalities clashed, their common goal enabled them to transcend those differences for the sake of collaboration. So, once you identify your common goal, you can start to learn your ABCDEs!

Accept Your Differences and Embrace Conflict

We're always told to accept other people for exactly who they are, and that's a great message. While we absolutely should be tolerant of others and respect those who are different from us, it can be hard to do that if the other person is actively antagonizing you because of your differences. So, if you find yourself in a sticky situation with your partnership of opposites, what can you do to work past it? Kahnweiler suggests that the ABCDE method is critical for conflict resolution, especially that very first step, "accepting the alien."

Because while it's easy to be tolerant in theory, in practice, we might find it a lot harder to accept things that are foreign to us, especially if that alien concept defines someone else's entire worldview. When we struggle with these differences, it's tempting to wish that our partner could see the world exactly the way we do and that desire often leads us to push others to accept our approach. It doesn't help that partnerships-- whether they're in a corporate or creative context-- usually come with deadlines and other stressors that bring out the worst in us. All these factors can come together to craft an atmosphere of simmering tension and the end result is usually animosity and resentment.

So, how can we prevent this from happening? The first step is to simply try and accept the alien aspects of your partner. The factors that make them tick may be mind-boggling to you, but trying to make them conform to you won't get you anywhere. Personality types are deeply ingrained, so it's highly unlikely that your introverted partner will morph into an extrovert overnight. So, instead of pushing them, take some dedicated time to understanding how their mind works and identifying appropriate boundaries. If there are little things each of you can do to be respectful of each other, don't question or belittle them; just take the opportunity to be kind. Likewise, if you and your partner have a disagreement, first acknowledge that you each handle conflict in two very different ways. Take time to understand why your partner responds the way she does and share

some insight about your feelings with her. The more you can understand and respect each other, the smoother your conflict resolution will be.

And once you've put in the work of getting to know your partner, you can move on to step B and bring on the battle! Conflict is never pleasant, but it is inevitable, and it's also one of the fastest paths to creative problem solving. So, whether you have a personal or professional disagreement, learn to talk things out and be open to your partner's feedback. After all, having a second opinion is one of the best things about having a partner! And personality differences can work out in your partnership's favor when one of you notices something that the other might not. These different perspectives can be a game-changer for your success, so learn to accept and celebrate each other's strengths and weaknesses.

Doing so will help you avoid the tragic flaws of other opposite partnerships which imploded due to a lack of respect. Luxury automobile corporation Chrysler enjoyed phenomenal success under the leadership of extroverted auto executive Robert Lutz and introverted CEO Robert Eaton because the two served as a united front. Playing to each other's strengths and weaknesses and welcoming healthy disagreement offered the freedom to expand their business and generate tremendous financial gain. But all this changed after a merger with Mercedes-Benz brought Jurgen Schrempp in as CEO.

Extroverted Schrempp viewed himself as superior because he was bold, loud, and assertive, and was dismissive of Eaton, who often kept his concerns to himself. This lack of understanding and respect generated such conflict that Eaton ultimately left the partnership he'd worked so hard to preserve, proving that no partnership can flourish without accepting each other's differences.

Strengthen Your Partnership

What strengths do you bring to the table? Are you awesome at motivating people, but not so great with details and spreadsheets? Do you live for quiet organization, but would rather die than speak in front of a crowd? These are great examples of the different strengths and weaknesses possessed by differing personalities, and it's a perfect illustration of how introverts and extroverts can come together to form a beautiful partnership. But blending your skills takes effort, and that's why the third step-- casting the character-- is so important. Casting yourself in a certain role like "the outgoing one" or "the detail-oriented one" allows you and your partner to clearly identify which roles and responsibilities should fall under whose purview.

Chinese online retailer Alibaba is a great example of a business that's thriving through a partnership with clearly defined roles. Jack Ma, the founder of Alibaba, is the creative one. He loves to come up with new ideas and he's the one who spots future opportunities for growth. His introverted partner, Jonathan Lu, takes his visions and makes them into realistic goals by going through the details with a fine-tooth comb. Where Ma might get bored with all the details or at least lack passion for them, Lu has a passion for structure and organization and he uses it to help the company generate financial success. As you can see, clearly defined roles with a complementary balance of skills is the secret to a successful partnership!

However, even successfully casting the character won't hold your partnership together without the next step: destroying the dislike. You and your partner don't have to be close friends for the partnership to be successful, but at the very least, you shouldn't be at each other's throats. Preventing this requires a certain degree of mutual respect, as illustrated through the example of Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniack. Although they were definitely not good friends, they did at least respect each other's talents and intelligence. That respect enabled each man to be open to new opportunities and to learn more about himself as well as his partner. In so

doing, they not only became better, more developed people, they also changed the future of technology!

And that brings us to the final step in crafting a successful partnership: acknowledging that each can't offer everything. Because the entire success of an opposites partnership is predicated on different strengths and weaknesses, it's vital to be realistic about what each of you can offer. So, be open about your weaknesses and don't be afraid to let your partner step up and offer their strength. Accepting help isn't always easy, but we need each other to grow and succeed, and that's the genius of opposites.

Final Summary

Introverts and extroverts often clash, but it's important that we learn to minimize disagreement and celebrate our differences instead! Because different personality types bring different strengths to the table, we can learn and grow from each other and foster successful partnerships along the way. By being willing to listen to different viewpoints and accept things that are foreign to us, we can challenge ourselves and our society to grow.



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