

# Quiet Summary

By Susan Cain

Are you the type of person who genuinely believes that silence is golden, and that quiet is a luxury? Have you ever wondered why some things that you might find exhausting, others find exhilarating?

*Quiet*, is about listening to, and acknowledging the power and indomitable strength of introverts. The world has been split, and is geared towards extroverts, and Susan Cain argues that this bias towards people who feed off high-energy scenarios, means introverts are often pushed aside.

As an introvert by nature, author Susan Cain faced this dilemma while growing up. She liked being quiet, but felt the world wanted her to be louder. Thinking back to a school camp, she remembers participating in the endless team activities, and the shouting of group cheers, when all she really wanted was just to sit quietly and read. This motivated her to research the science behind personality, with a particular focus on introversion.

Did you know that one in three of your friends sees themselves as an introvert? Or, maybe you're the introvert in the group? The message is, that even if you're not an introvert, you know someone who is. Understanding the people around us is essential to forging better work, friend, or family relationships.

The challenge today, is that we're biased towards the extrovert. This bias results in two problems. The first problem is that we undervalue the quiet strength of introverts, and secondly, we cater to what extroverts need to

be at their best. Modern society seldom takes time to understand, or accommodate the introvert. Hence, being an introvert can often be difficult in a world that doesn't necessarily cater to them. However, the world needs the quiet strength of introverts.

This brief summary offers an understanding of personality types, that's immensely helpful. It's essential to realize the things that drive us, and things that might deplete us. Both introverts and extroverts have unique strengths, but each of these personalities has different needs. So knowing our personality type, helps us to identify what we need to thrive, not just to survive. Carl Jung, the psychologist who introduced these two terms, said there's no such thing as a pure introvert or extrovert. We fall somewhere on a continuum, with introversion on one end, and extroversion on the other.

## **Understanding the Continuum**

Where we fall on the introvert-extrovert continuum, isn't determined by how shy or outgoing we believe we are. Personality isn't so simple. For example, introverts can behave like extroverts, and vice versa.

Let's look at the quiet guy in the office. We may think that he's incredibly shy because he's quiet at work, but maybe he can talk for hours on end when he's around his close friends. The social butterfly might appear extroverted, but she might also be the introvert who craves the quiet solitude of downtime when the party's over. A leader might stand in the spotlight, not because she likes it, but because she feels compelled to do what she believes is right.

Our personality traits are less about choice, and more a matter of

neurological wiring. The real distinguishing feature is how we respond to stimulation, including social stimulation. By nature, extroverts crave stimulation, whereas introverts prefer lower levels of outside stimulation. Furthermore, introverts tend to gravitate towards safe quieter environments, especially when they need to recharge.

So, it's not that introverts are quiet, but rather that they need quiet, to function at their best.

## **Our Biology Lays the Foundation to How We Experience the World**

And to explain, let's look at life handing us lemons. To begin, an extrovert's biological makeup is different from an introvert's, as we'll prove by bringing in some lemons. In 1967, psychologist Hans Eysenck, dropped lemon juice onto the tongues of extroverts and introverts. He then measured how much saliva was produced, and he found that introverts immediately produced more saliva.

This finding is significant because it shows that introverts have a lower threshold for tolerating sensations like sights, sounds, and smells. This indicates that an introvert's nervous system is more sensitive than the average nervous system. As a result, they have more intense reactions to their environment. It's a trait that can be genetically inherited, and detected as early as four months. A baby with stronger reactions to external stimuli, is more likely to be introverted by nature. So, knowing the right amount of stimulation that nurtures your nature, will not only help you cope, but to thrive.

The problem is that our society leans towards the extrovert. Open-plan offices, bright lights, overcrowded malls, or noisy parties - these are all ways to excite the extrovert, but overwhelm the introvert. In a sense, it's a cultural bias.

## **Introverts Often Feel Out of Their Comfort Zone**

The cultural bias towards extroverts, means that introverts often feel uneasy in the world. This feeling is because schools and workplaces favor the extroverts' need for stimulation.

If we look at a typical classroom, we'll see how this manifests. You'll see desks that are grouped in pods, lots of visual stimuli, and the focus is often on group work and group activities. Similarly, offices are often open-plan, with no walls, subjecting everyone to noise and their co-workers' constant gaze.

Our society promotes the extrovert ideal. Self-help books teach us how to "win friends and influence people." Teachers tend to believe that the ideal student is the outgoing, more outspoken one. And, at work, introverts are often passed over for leadership positions. All of this means that we dramatically undervalue introverts, and in doing so, we lose a lot.

## **Introverts Need to Question Themselves Less**

Rather than question themselves, introverts need to look harder at the world around them.

There was once a boy who was so quiet and shy, that he would run straight home from school at the end of the day, to avoid socializing with classmates. As he grew older, he remained a quiet and shy man. Rather than seeing his shyness as a fault, he believed that these traits were his strengths. He coupled these traits with an instinct that made him want to stand against oppression. Over time he decided to speak up on behalf of others. His motto was: 'In a gentle way, you can shake the world.' His name was Mahatma Gandhi. If we look towards the United States, in 1955, Rosa Parks quietly refused to give up her seat on a bus. Her bold defiance set in motion one of the most significant social movements in history, the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Both of these people were brave and powerful: yet describe themselves as quiet, soft-spoken, and even shy. Furthermore, there's an abundance of quiet thinkers who are responsible for many important discoveries and artistic achievements.

So the question we need to ask is: how can workplaces and schools, allow both personality types to complement each other?

## **A Glimpse Into the Workplace**

Research shows that charismatic leaders have higher salaries than introverted leaders. However, more charisma does not mean better performance. A study reviewing 128 CEOs of major companies concluded that introverts actually outperform extroverts in certain circumstances. Introverts are particularly capable when leading proactive employees, because they listen deeply, and are more willing to implement suggestions. So when it comes to leadership in the workplace, we need to level out the loudness, because there's zero correlation between being

the best talker, and having the best idea. And, really successful companies opt for the dynamic duo approach.

Steve Jobs was no doubt an innovator, but his introverted Apple co-founder, Steve Wozniak, truly brought these innovations to life. Working alone at his cubicle at Hewlett-Packard, Wozniak created the first personal computer. He said he would never have become such an expert, if it wasn't for his introverted nature.

On the other hand, extroverts like Jobs, excel at presenting ideas to strangers, enjoy new social networking events, and make crucial connections. Ultimately extroverts are risk-driven. Introverts are better threat detectors, and therefore, better risk assessors. They persist more on problems, observe, listen intently, and tend to be more detail-oriented.

What we need to remember is that teams with both introverts and extroverts, complement each other. They can rely on each other's strengths and counteract each other's weaknesses. So it's up to us to discern and play towards our strengths; and it's then for companies, to know how to leverage them.

What's more, if creativity and innovation are required, then maybe it's time to play by the introvert's rules, because many creative people have a serious streak of introversion. For example, Charles Darwin took long lonely walks in the woods, and used this as his deep thinking time. JK Rowling booked herself into a hotel, carving out alone time to finish her last Harry Potter novel. The author behind Dr. Seuss, dreamed up these amazing stories, while working in a lonely room at the back of his house. He reported being afraid that children might meet him, and be disappointed by his reserved nature, comparing him to the jolly characters he wrote about.

The introvert's strengths are that they prefer to work alone, focus on one task at a time, and tend to have a remarkable ability to concentrate. Research shows that this kind of deep work, done alone, is needed to elicit creative and innovative thinking. The difficulty is that today's work environment, is geared towards distraction and interaction. Open-plan offices, team building, and brainstorming sessions populate the modern workplace. And, group work, doesn't always work. Studies show that people produce more ideas when they're alone, and that these ideas generated, are often of higher quality. It's worth noting that the bigger the group, the worse the performance.

Finally, we often lose out on introvert's valuable ideas because extroverts tend to think out loud, and speak up more. As a result, the opinions of the extrovert get the most airtime. Groups also mirror each other's way of thinking, and easily conform, which hinders our capacity for original thinking. So it's worth considering giving more space to the introverts, to maximize creative thinking and problem-solving.

**To Maximize Creativity, You Might Need to Break**

## Some Rules

So how do we create spaces where different personalities can thrive?

The first thing is to create flexible work environments that allow for remote working. We should also allow people to prepare before meetings and brainstorming sessions, in order to generate ideas beforehand.

Schools can also get creative, and help quieter pupils to speak up, without feeling intimidated. A student Briana recalled how daunting she found groupwork. Briana's teacher provided each student with three sticks before class, and they then had to sit in a circle and discuss that day's topic. A stick could only be discarded if you contributed to the discussion. Leftover sticks at the end of class, signaled lower grades. This meant that introverts would ultimately receive lower grades than the extroverts. This experience was a nightmare for introverts such as Briana, and it was also incredibly counter-productive. A lot of extroverted students just started talking for the sake of talking, and this resulted in meaningless discussion, instead of any mindful dialogue.

Cain suggests the "think, pair, and share" approach. It's a slightly different, but beneficial technique, because it provides necessary thinking time. The idea is to give students time alone to think and then pair them up to discuss ideas and thoughts. After that, the class can come together as a whole, and reflect further. This approach creates a friendlier, more conducive environment for introverts.

## In Conclusion

Whether you're an introvert or an extrovert, we all need to evaluate



personality types and create win-win situations for everyone. It's not fair that there's a cultural bias towards extroverts, and that the world has been tailored to accommodate their needs. It's worth assessing where we and those around us, fit on the continuum. After that, we can adapt environments to bring out the best in ourselves and others.

Being quiet and shy isn't a weakness, and Susan Cain reminds us of the introvert's quiet power, as well as their unique needs and invaluable contributions. The final message is that introverts need to take back their power. And, we should all be aware that there's no one-size-fits-all when it comes to how we function best.

Look at yourself and your environment, and ask yourself whether you're being allowed to function at your very best.