

The Magic of Working Alone with Somebody Else-the Right Somebody Else

"I drink alone," rocker George Thorogood snarled in his hit song of the same name.

Well, good for you, George. I'm not sure how to respond other than to say that I don't share your philosophy on the consumption of adult beverages.

But your song on the radio this morning reminded me of something, of a similar declaration of independence that I have made repeatedly, throughout my life:

I **work** alone.

Like many introverts (*insert bluesy, guitar-driven background music here*)...

I work alone, yeah.

With nobody else.

I work alone, yeah.

With nobody else.

You know when I work alone,

I prefer to be by myself.

I do in fact work alone most of the time. With nobody else. And when I work alone, I do indeed prefer to be by myself. It's almost a badge of honor.

But just as Mr. Thorogood probably drinks with other people from time to time, by necessity or by choice, I work with other people from time to time. Usually by necessity. Occasionally by choice.

A few weeks ago, out of the necessity driven by my role as David lost in a Goliath-like wilderness, I chose to work with Kate McMillan of [Outbox Online Design Studio](#) in Portland, Oregon, some 1,500 miles from my home office here in the

tundra of Moorhead, Minnesota.

Kate is helping me redesign my Introvert Insights website. By “helping” I mean doing it for me. And by “redesign” I mean revamp, refresh, reinvigorate. Make that resuscitate. It’s CPR. In fact, my website needed not just new life but life to begin with, especially visually. And, well, I’m a word guy.

So I did something many of us introverts hate doing—particularly those of us blessed with that pesky Y chromosome.

I asked for help.

Kicking and screaming, I asked for help. I chose to be part of a collaborative team effort with Kate McMillan, who I’ve never met in person and likely never will.

I chose wisely.

Robert Frost once famously wrote, in his poem “The Road Not Taken”:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

Working with Kate these past few weeks has made all the difference, but I say that with only a small nod to my new website. What has mattered to me more than anything—and this is a common “introvert thing”—is not so much what Kate and I have done together, but how we have done it.

Kate, I don’t know if you’re an introvert yourself. I suspect you might be, but it hardly matters. All I can say is this: You sure work like an introvert. Me too. And that has made all the difference on this road I so rarely travel by.

Here’s just a small sampling of the introvert-friendly way that Kate and I have collaborated together since I first approached her about six weeks ago:

We’ve communicated almost exclusively via email. We introverts hate being interrupted, and we hate interrupting others. So when email came along in the early 1990s, it was a godsend—a godsend we have latched on to and will likely never relinquish.

Kate and I have been “talking” back and forth via email for the most part. We’ve had two phone calls as well—including one marathon session—but we arranged both of them ahead of time. Via email. Thus the calls were expected, and we could both prepare for them in advance (which we did). Minimal chitchat. Maximum productivity. But still plenty of laughs and sharing and getting to know each other.

We’ve implicitly demonstrated along the way that we don’t want or need the other person to respond to our emails instantaneously. Again, it’s all about disrupting—or, more accurately, not disrupting someone when they’re in the middle of something. I email Kate. She emails me. I don’t expect her to be sitting by her email inbox, dying to hear from me. She doesn’t expect me to be obsessing by my inbox, either. Our email communications are calm, “chill” as the kids like to say today. Professional always, but almost completely devoid of stress or demand.

We’ve been detailed in the emails we’ve written to each other, and we’ve demonstrated that we’ve done our respective homework assignments beforehand. I researched Kate pretty thoroughly before contacting her, and when I did contact her I was very thorough in responding to her questions about my wants/needs for the new website. She, in turn, was thorough when she wrote back to me. And during our phone calls especially, she was unbelievably thorough in covering the ground we needed to cover—visuals, content, technical aspects, you name it—efficiently but thoughtfully.

We’ve been organized. We’ve worked from a schedule, one that Kate laid out and we both committed to. After our lengthy planning meeting on the phone, Kate sent me a detailed summary within hours—a summary that included a handy checklist of all the things I needed to do, both editorially and technically. She gave me an exact batting order of how to proceed. It took none of the work away, but it took virtually all of the stress away.

We’ve listened well to each other. Kate has somehow gotten into my head and my heart through this process, largely because she’s an exceptionally good listener but also because she actually reads the responses to the questions on her forms. I listen carefully to Kate, too. What I know for sure is that she quickly seemed to understand me and where I’m coming from on this passion of mine—this calling to teach the world about introverts and introversion. She also

seems to understand that on my website in particular, I want to be genuine. I told her early on:

“I can’t have my website communicate the exact opposite of the message I’m trying to spread about introverts and introversion. I need my website to project calm. To be calm. I need it to be welcoming, and to align with the laid-back person I really am.”

Kate has not only listened to me; she’s heard me. Is there anything an introvert wants more?

I will always want to work alone, as most introverts do. But there is magic in working alone with the right somebody else—somebody who gets how introverts work and offers the best of both worlds: independence and interdependence.

So thanks, Kate, for reminding me of the value of collaboration. Introvert style.