



i introvert **I** insights

Step Outside Your Comfort Zone—or Into It—As You See Fit

About once a week growing up, we had liver for dinner. “It’s good for you,” Mom declared, citing no medical evidence. As importantly where our family was concerned, it was cheap.

Liver, as everyone well knows, tastes like an old football, though it is much less tender. We kids eventually discovered that liver also shares the football’s durability; my brother Mike once hid his piece of liver in Mom’s china cabinet, where it was discovered, still intact, by my sister Kathy more than a decade later.

Bon appétit.

I never understood why Mom made (let alone made us eat) liver, especially when it seemed as though she didn’t exactly love it herself. Years later, though, she told me the simple truth.

“It was for your dad,” she said with a shrug.

Dad, it turns out, actually liked the liver, and not simply the bacon and onions and mashed potatoes disguising it. So Mom decided, on purpose, to make it for him. Often.

She almost killed the rest of us in the process, but that’s beside the

point. The real point is this: Mom **chose** to step outside her own comfort zone, if only in this small way, and she did it for a worthy **purpose**.

Ideally, that’s the way stepping outside your comfort zone should be: it should be you stepping, not you being shoved. It should be something you decide to do, not a demand or an admonishment you feel you must obey. And you should have a good reason for doing it vs. doing it just because (or just because someone tells you to).

Unfortunately, where introverts are concerned especially, the phrase “step outside your comfort zone” too often feels just like “eat your liver”: questionable with respect to its assumed benefits, doled out as face-value wisdom, off-putting, maddening—the opposite of helpful. Even though it is almost always delivered with helpful intent.

The “Capacity Zone”

The other day I came across an article titled “Get Out of Your Comfort Zone to Boost Your Career.” It

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TIPS, TRICKS, AND TOOLS

WORKPLACE SUCCESS

It Pays to Tell People What You Need to Succeed at Work

Last summer, my wife Adrienne gave me a laughably simple gift to help me maintain both my productivity and my sanity: a “Please Do Not Disturb” sign to hang on the handle of my office door.

I work from home, and so in the summer the kids are—well, they’re home too. (Love you, kids.) This, ahem, doesn’t always exactly lend itself to the peaceful, quiet working environment that an introvert like me needs to not only be successful, but to simply be at all in terms of my mental and emotional health.

My “Please Do Not Disturb” sign tells my kids—and Adrienne too since, as a kindergarten teacher, she is also home in the summer—to let me be unless there is blood involved.

Amazingly, it actually works—though with the kids there was a short period of training involved.

I wish I had taken this step sooner. More accurately, and hon-

estly, I wish I had taken this step instead of waiting around for Adrienne to step in on my behalf.

Because the other thing I’ve learned from my “Please Do Not Disturb” sign is that, as an introvert, you’ve got to be uncharacteristically vocal about telling people what you need to be successful in your work, whatever the setting.

You can have some fun with it, though. In fact, a touch of humor will probably make your message go down a little easier among your co-workers and/or the others you’re trying to communicate with, as illustrated by Heidi Brown, author of *The Introverted Lawyer: A Seven-Step Journey Toward Authentically Empowered Advocacy*.

In a recent *ABA Journal* article entitled “Talented but Overlooked: We Should Transform Hiring and Mentoring of Introverted Lawyers,” Brown says that “encouraging transparency and supporting diverse methodologies” can help introverts (and extraverts) do and be their best



at work.

As Brown puts it in the context of the lawyer’s work environment:

“An honestly phrased note on a door that says something like ‘Introvert zone: Finishing a brief that is due in three hours. Will be free for human contact at 6:30!’ could be a simple but effective vehicle for better work product and a happier, healthier, more productive introverted lawyer.”

PARENTING STRATEGIES

Find Ways to Take “Solitude Breaks” Throughout Your Day

Parenting is the ultimate in rewarding. It’s also utterly exhausting, particularly if you’re an introvert who—just to pick a few random examples that have nothing at all to do with my own household—can take only so much “he/she started it” or “I want ____” or, my personal favorite, “I don’t know.”

Journalist and author Dilvin Yasa, in her recent *Nine.com.au* website article entitled “The Precarious Art of Parenting as an Introvert,” says she’s been perfecting that art herself for 10 years now.

One of her key strategies: Pursuing regular “solitude breaks” for herself. Intentionally. Purposefully.

Every day.

“This means the odd five-minute coffee break in another room (or,

better yet, by walking by yourself to a local café), to 30 minutes of reading time on your bed with the door shut,” Yasa writes.

“It could even be taking your ironing to a part of the house where you’re the only person in it.”

Yasa doesn’t come right out and say it, but I just might also know from firsthand experience this additional secret: Our kids sometimes need a little break from us, too.

“No” and “Gotta Go” Are Both Perfectly All Right—Use Them

Writer and journalist Sirin Kale says she used to be “a high-performing introvert in an extravert’s garb,” particularly when it came to social gatherings.

“I would get back from parties and want to peel my skin off from the sheer relief of the performance being over, shrugging off my extravert suit and collapsing into bed,” says Kale, in her recent article in *The Guardian* entitled “How I Accepted

I’m an Introvert—and Learned to Refuse Invitations Without Guilt.”

These days, though, Kale is much more aware—not only of her own introversion but also of the notion that all of us can make individual choices about socializing.

In other words, “no” is a legitimate response to a party invitation. And “gotta go” is an acceptable statement to make when you **are** at a gathering and you’ve had enough.

“Introverts are often unfairly maligned, framed either as troubled loners or posturing snobs,” Kale

says. “But in my experience, true friends are more accepting of a polite ‘no’ than you may think.”

Similarly, Kale stresses, no one particularly notices if you leave an event early.

“My head spins thinking of all the evenings I shunted myself up into top gear like the Millennium Falcon going into hyperdrive,” she writes, “gossiping and laughing and drinking when really I was having an awful time and wanted to go home. Why didn’t I just leave? No one would have cared.”

RELAXATION AND RENEWAL

“Silent” Book Clubs Offer Introverted Twist on Old Idea

One evening back in 2012, writer Guinevere de la Mare and her friend Laura Gluhanich were having a glass of wine at a San Francisco bistro when de la Mare began complaining about a book club she was in at the time.

She wasn’t interested in the assigned book, she says in an article on the *Chronicle Books Blog*. In fact, she was “slogging through it,” trying to finish it in time for the next club meeting.

“I felt an intense pressure, self-inflicted as it was, to have something **insightful** to contribute to the conversation, and I was feeling grouchy about it,” writes de la Mare, author of the 2017 book *I’d Rather Be Reading: A Library of Art for Book Lovers*.

So she went on a short rant. Introvert style.

“I want a book club,” she blurted out to Gluhanich, “where there’s no assigned reading, where you can bring whatever book you want, and

you can just sit and read it and not have to talk about it.

“A **silent** book club.”

Gluhanich’s immediate, albeit somewhat unexpected, response: “I’m in. Let’s do this.”

And so began the first Silent Book Club. Today, there are more than 50 chapters of the club worldwide, in cities large and not so large, and members gather at meetings to do exactly what de la Mare originally envisioned: Read. Alone. Together.

Specifically, members bring their own books to each meeting; briefly tell each other what they’re reading (a simple way for the members to learn about other books **they** may want to read); and then read in silence for an hour or two, no interruptions allowed.

“Silent Book Club is happy hour for introverts,” de la Mare says.

To find—or start—an affiliated Silent Book Club near you, visit SilentBook.club.



IT'S AN INTROVERT'S LIFE

Do You Know How to Reset Your Introvert Circuit Breaker?

By Peter Vogt

Appliances die in sets of three. So we've been on deathwatch at our house for several months now.

First to go was the washer. It still worked, technically speaking, when we replaced it with a new one about six weeks ago. But for the better part of a year, whenever the washer had reached the spin cycle, it had made the mildly annoying sound of an F-16 firing up for takeoff.

At the very end, the spin cycle would last only a minute or two before stalling in "UL" (Unbalanced Load ... or was it Ultra Loud?) mode. We then had to rearrange the soggy laundry inside, restart the cycle, put in earplugs, and, inevitably, repeat the process several times to coax a load through to the finish.

When you're starting to think that it might actually be better all around to beat your clothes clean on a rock by the river, it's time to cave and get a new washer. So we did.

The very same day that new washer was installed—dazzling us and our sunken standards with the overly cheerful little ditty it plays when a load is done—our dishwasher stepped up and said, "My turn."

By the sound of it, a large rock had lodged somewhere inside the dishwasher—not an impossibility given that our kids usually load the thing. We began having to shout in its presence.

It has apparently made a temporary comeback, though. Perhaps the rock has now eroded away entirely,

or a canyon has been carved into it in just the right spot. Meanwhile, we hold our breath, knowing it's just a matter of time before the dishwasher too will have cleaned its last item.

So yesterday morning, I was a little miffed but not surprised when, after hearing the new washer's gleeful song, I went downstairs, loaded the laundry into the dryer, hit the power button, and got ... nothing. No lights, no sounds, no anything.

"Isaac [our oldest son] just used this thing last night!" I silently complained to myself as I stood there bewildered.

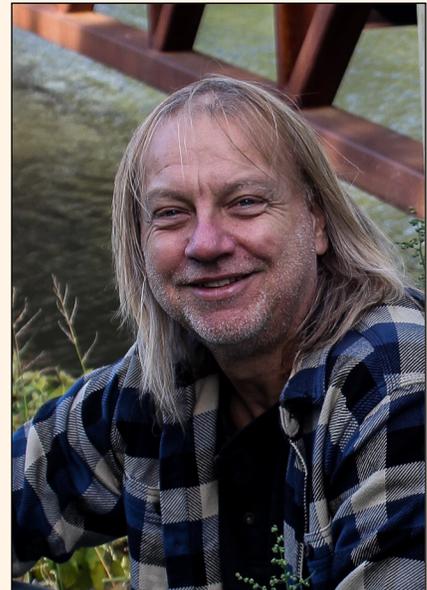
The power was still on to the singing washer, and to the rest of the laundry room. Still, I wondered after pushing buttons a few more times: Could it be as simple as ...?

Yes. Turns out the dryer has its own circuit on our breaker, and the breaker had tripped. All I had to do was reset the switch and shazam: all was well once again.

Is it possible that you and I and all other introverts out there have circuit breakers too—and that we need to trust them, and reset them after they've tripped?

I got to thinking about that idea after reading a moving *Psychotherapy Networker* article by psychologist Michael Alcée entitled "'Nobody Knows!' Helping Introverts Appreciate Their Strengths."

In the piece, Alcée presents a poignant case study of a student named Jessica that he worked with for several years in his role at a college counseling center.



Jessica struggled with low self-worth, which asserted itself in the form of near-constant anxiety, particularly in social contexts. As Jessica herself put it, according to Alcée: "I've always thought I had some kind of defect, like a design flaw."

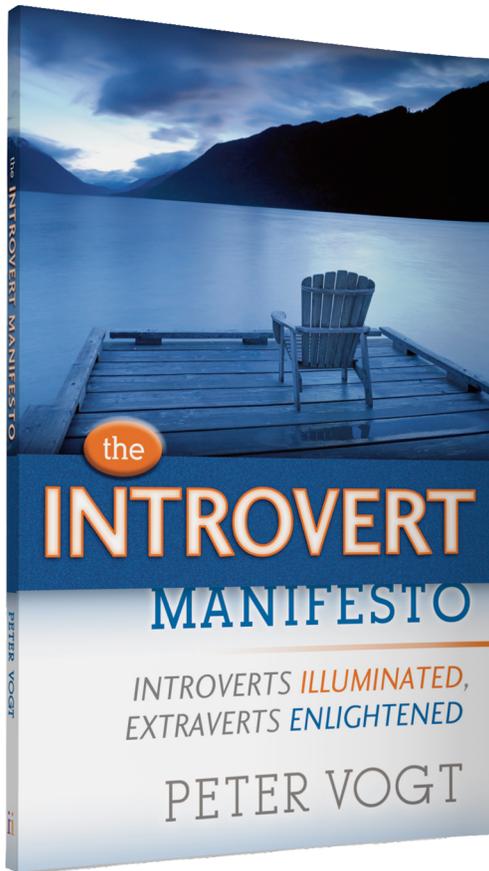
Eventually, first Alcée and then Jessica and Alcée together figured out that Jessica was (and is) simply an introvert. And slowly, Jessica began to see her anxiety not as something to beat herself up over, but, as Alcée puts it, "a messenger for her to take care of herself."

A circuit breaker.

"Jessica began to relate to her introversion like the battery on her phone," Alcée writes. "When it was running low, she wouldn't berate or denigrate it; she'd just charge herself up with the right things—reading, reflecting, retreating. 'My three R's,' she started to call it."

How do you know when your own introvert circuit breaker is about to trip, or already has? And what do you do, or can you do, to reset it—so that you'll be singing your own happy tune once again?

Introverts. Explained. Accurately.



That's the radically simple idea behind *The Introvert Manifesto: Introverts Illuminated, Extraverts Enlightened*, by Peter Vogt, editor and publisher of *Introvert Insights*.

Read extensive excerpts and order your paperback copy now at:

IntrovertManifesto.com

Also available on Amazon

PRACTICAL RESEARCH

Long-Term Relationships: Be Yourself to Make Them Thrive

If you're interested in developing a **lasting** significant-other relationship, you're best off simply being yourself vs. playing hard to get (e.g., not returning calls or texts) or, perhaps worse, trying to be someone you're not, according to a recent article in the journal *Personality and Individual Differences*.

The article details a series of four studies led by Lawrence Josephs, a professor of psychology at Adelphi University in New York. The research focuses in depth on the idea of *authenticity*, which, according to Josephs, consists of two dimensions: "Taking risks for intimacy that might make you vulnerable to rejection for expressing your true feelings; and the unacceptability of deception, which requires honesty even if the truth

might upset others."

The first study in the series noted that people who are high in authenticity have better long-term relationship outcomes than people who play hard to get and are high in the "Dark Triad" traits of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy.

The second study showed that people high in authenticity are given to displaying emotional openness, transparency, and availability when they are in serious dating and long-term relationships.

Study 3 revealed that, in the context of dating, people who engage in authentic behaviors are more attractive than people who play hard to get. And Study 4 showed that when people feel they can be themselves in a relationship, they are less likely to play hard to get and more likely to show interest in and availability to a potential partner.

The results of the four studies together, says Josephs, suggest that simply being who you are is the best strategy for developing successful long-term relationships.

"From the perspective of evolutionary psychology, this makes sense," he says.

"Someone who is authentic in a dating context despite the risks of rejection for showing vulnerability is demonstrating a proven capacity to be honest and straightforward even when there might be a price to be paid for being a person of integrity that doesn't play games."

Sources: "Why Authenticity Is the Best Dating Strategy," *Psychology Today* website, March 2, 2019; "Be Yourself: Authenticity as a Long-Term Mating Strategy," *Personality and Individual Differences*, 143 (June 2019), pp. 118-127.

REFLECTIVE READS

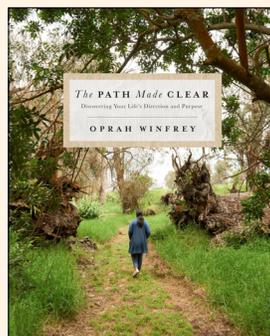
The Path Made Clear Offers Guidance on Life Purpose

One of Oprah Winfrey's core beliefs goes like this: You need to know and accept who you are—who you really are, deep down—before you can possibly know what to do in life.

I wholeheartedly agree.

But figuring out who you are is challenging, even intimidating and scary in some ways—which is why so many of us put it off til tomorrow or summer or next year or ...

Fortunately, though, it's a task that calls upon the typical introvert's many strengths: thinking, reflecting,



listening, observing, analyzing, synthesizing. Which means it's a challenge you're well-equipped to tackle.

In *The Path Made Clear: Discovering Your Life's Direction and Purpose*, Winfrey serves as a helpful guide. In the book, she shares not only her own stories, beliefs, and observa-

tions about life but also those of many others, most of whom are household names.

The wisdom comes in small, easily digestible nuggets, and it's all accompanied by more than 100 gorgeous photographs that make the book easy on the eyes even while it's engaging your brain.

Winfrey doesn't hold back on what she really thinks about concepts like calling and life direction: "I believe every one of us is born with a purpose," she stresses.

The Path Made Clear is her attempt to help us all quiet ourselves enough to spot it—and then do something with it.

Continued from page 1

said, in part: “Being able to step outside of your comfort zone is essential if you want to create a successful career. ... You could do more in your career or with your business if you step outside of your comfort zone more.”

Is this bad advice? No, not on the surface. But there’s a degree of black-and-white certainty behind such statements that grates on the nerves after a while. Particularly the introvert’s nerves.

Beth Buelow, author of the thorough and inspirational book *The Introvert Entrepreneur: Amplify Your Strengths and Create Success on Your Own Terms*, writes that she has decided to stop using the phrase “step outside your comfort zone” altogether, especially since, as she points out, it is “usually preceded by the words *you have to*.”

“After all,” she begins, perhaps only half tongue-in-cheek, “why would I want to step outside my comfort zone? My comfort zone is filled with dark chocolate, naps, kitty cats, my BFFs, spending a quiet evening at home, and reading in my comfy chair.”

But in short order, Buelow outlines a much more compelling argument for her shift in thinking—one that illustrates the critical impacts of both vocabulary and mindset.

“I have realized that the word *comfort* [in *comfort zone*] comes laden with judgment,” she writes. “Being in the comfort zone = bad/safe, being out = good/scary.”

Better instead, then, she says, to think in terms of your *capacity zone*—and to then work on expanding it.

“Words matter,” she concludes. “Within this reframing, the context shifts: Instead of moving from bad/safe to good/scary, I’m moving



from good to better. I’m moving from a place of power to expanded power rather than from weakness to relative power.”

Harness the Comfort

Summer Turner coaches introverted women who are, or who want to become, solopreneurs. Visit her website and you will immediately see where she stands on the “step outside your comfort zone” concept as a universally beneficial and/or effective life strategy.

“Create Meaningful Success from INSIDE Your Comfort Zone,” the top of her homepage counters.

In her recent *Thrive Global* website article “Stop Telling Introverts to Leave Their Comfort Zone! What to Say Instead ...,” Turner calls *comfort zone* “a loaded term”—one that many introverts hear as “you have to become more like extraverts.”

She acknowledges that we all have a *complacency zone* we need to stay out of—“that place where we hide in order to maintain the status quo as a (false) way of feeling safe,” she writes, and where we engage in activities like procrastination, rationalization, and “listening to the inner critic as if it’s telling the truth.”

But Turner says your comfort

zone as an introvert should be something you step **into**, not out of.

So “start giving some thought about what people, places, situations, and activities are within your comfort zone,” she stresses.

“Use your natural strength of strategic thinking to plan how you can operate from inside your comfort zone so you can function authentically, in accordance with your own brain and nervous-system wiring.”

Maximize Your Strengths

Let’s face it: We all **have** to step outside our comfort zones at times, sometimes with little or no preparation. We don’t always get to choose, nor should we expect to.

But far more often than not, we can make our own decisions. We can start by not only defining our own personal comfort zones but also by self-determining how and when we step out of them, and for whom/what—and, especially, why.

We can also acknowledge that when it comes to operating from within our comfort zones, it’s likely that we haven’t fully leveraged our many introverted strengths. Not really. So we should do **that** before trying to become something—or someone—else.



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INTROVERT INSPIRATIONS

“Introverts do not need to speak all the time to have an effect on others.”

~ Heidi Brown

“Introversion comes with many strengths. Be aware of them and develop them.”

~ Jeremiah Nyambane

“The real reason introverts need to ‘disappear’ has nothing to do with a character flaw. It’s biological. And scheduling downtime is crucial for the introvert’s well-being.”

~ Summer Turner

“It’s better to be authentic than to be someone you’re not.”

~ Emma Donaldson-Feilder

“Introverts are like icebergs—you only see what’s on the surface, and there is a whole world lurking underneath.”

~ Kayla Matthews