



introvert insights

Your Introversion Is a Part of You; Your Shyness Need Not Be

By Peter Vogt

If you were to conduct a simple nationwide poll asking people to describe introverts in just one word, one little word in particular would likely come up most often.

Shy.

To the average person on the street, introversion and shyness are one and the same.

That's a problem—a potentially damaging one. Because as shyness and social anxiety expert Sean Cooper succinctly puts it in a post on his blog: "In reality, there's a huge difference between shyness and introversion."

It's critical for you to understand that difference, whether you yourself are more of an introvert or more of an extravert.

Shyness is a **behavioral difficulty**, one that holds you back, against your wishes, via fear—your fear of looking stupid or feeling embarrassed or being rejected by others, for example.

Thus, if you're shy, you can (and likely want to) do something about

it; you can work to improve it or even eliminate it from your life, as many of us have over the years.

Introversion, on the other hand, isn't a difficulty at all. There's no fear involved in introversion, either. Introversion is just a normal set of **preferences** for how you tend to live your life.

Don't fall into the trap of equating these two concepts, as Joe and Jane Sixpack are prone to do.

"Introversion is all about **you**," Cooper stresses. "Shyness is not about you and your preferences, but about **other people**."

Introversion vs. Shyness

Every year during Labor Day weekend, my family and I go to my wife Adrienne's hometown of Tracy, Minnesota, for a carnival/fair event called Boxcar Days.

Every year, Adrienne wants me to accompany her downtown on Saturday night to what's known as the Beer Tent so she can catch up with some of her high school friends in the din of bright lights and

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TIPS, TRICKS, AND TOOLS

SELF-CARE TECHNIQUES

Your Body Tells You When You Need an Introvert Break

If you're like many introverts, you sometimes don't—or can't—figure out you're overcooking in life until the mental, emotional, and/or physical frying is well under way.

That's why it's so crucial for you to recognize, and then heed, your own personal warning signs that you're pushing too hard, too far, or too long, says self-care advisor Sarah

Jane, in her recent blog post “7 Self-Care Tips for Introverts.”

“Unlike our smartphones, we don't get notifications about what's draining our battery, what percent we're on, and how many hours we have left,” Jane writes.

“But we do have warning signs, and if we can learn to identify these [signs], we can protect ourselves from a faulty battery and limited performance.”

Jane says your body will have its

own “unique way of reminding you” when you need to take some introverted time to recharge.

“For me,” she says, “I know it's time to embrace my inner hermit when I catch myself constantly checking the clock, daydreaming about going home.”

For you, it might be crankiness ... or difficulty taking in even one tiny bit more of mental input ... or a pounding headache ... or—well, you get the idea.

NETWORKING STRATEGIES

Prepare for Networking Events as You Would for an Interview

It isn't all that hard to guess what at least some of the questions will be in a job interview—and thus prepare yourself, in advance, to answer them thoughtfully and memorably.

Why not use that same strategy when you attend networking meetings, conferences, and similar events, says productivity consultant Brooks Duncan, in his recent blog post “5 Strategies to Network Productively Even If You Are an Introvert.”

“You meet someone at an event, and what questions are you guaranteed to get in the first few minutes? ‘Where are you from?’ ‘What do you do?’ ‘What brings you to the event?’ ‘Who was your favorite speaker today?’ You **know** you are going to get these questions,” Brooks writes.

“So why not put some thought into your answers?”

If Brooks himself were asked what he does for a living, for instance, he

could easily fall into saying “I work with computers” or “I do online education,” he says.

“But isn't it more effective to say ‘I'm the COO of an executive training company where we help leaders be more productive. The only thing is, I work at home in my basement, so I'm happy to be here talking to other real human beings...’?”

“Chances are, that conversation is going to go to talking about what

kind of training we do,” Brooks writes. “Or, more likely, [it] will go in the ‘wow, I could never work from home’ direction.

“Either way, great!”

The idea isn't for you to develop “a canned and boring elevator pitch,” Brooks cautions.

“It's more about anticipating common questions,” he says, “and having pre-thought answers that will move the conversation along.”



Who Are You Talking to When Time Seems to Stand Still?

In the movie “Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince,” Professor Horace Slughorn owns an hourglass that is one of a kind.

“Most intriguing object,” he describes it to Harry at one point. “The sand runs in accordance with the quality of the conversation.”

“If it’s stimulating,” Slughorn goes on, “the sand runs slowly. If it is not...”

Harry interrupts Slughorn at that point, and the two of them go on to have a deep conversation about Harry’s archenemy, Voldemort, who killed Harry’s parents.

By the end of the brief but intense interaction, the sand in Slughorn’s hourglass almost freezes.

“Deep conversations are like that: like time is freezing, like the only thing that matters are the ideas presented, argued, and discussed,” says writer and yogi Ely Bakouche, in her recent blog post “The Secret Lives of Introverts: 6 Myths Debunked.”

The challenge for you if you’re an introvert who thrives on such discussions, Bakouche stresses, is “to find curious minds who’ll have those debates as often as time allows.”

Who are the people in your life with whom conversation seems to make time stop?

Put your energy there.



COMMUNICATION TIPS

“I’d Like to Think About That” Honors What’s Been Shared

What do you do when you’ve listened to someone sharing something—perhaps something quite difficult for them to reveal, like a marriage problem or a serious illness—and you have no earthly idea how to respond?

For starters, “[I]t’s OK to say ‘I don’t know what to say’ when you don’t,” says journalist Kate Murphy, in her recently published book *You’re Not Listening: What You’re Missing and Why It Matters*. (See a brief review of the book in the June 2020 issue of *Introvert Insights*.)

But you can also play to one of

your many introvert strengths and say: “I’d like to think about that.”

Doing so “conveys that you honor what the other person said by taking time to think about it,” Murphy stresses.

At the same time, she says, saying “I’d like to think about that” honors “the part of you that is uncertain and needs time to process.”



IT'S AN INTROVERT'S LIFE

Goodbye, Saturn Vue—Hello, Introverted Learning Project

By Peter Vogt

My 2003 Saturn Vue has—or at least it had—a Kelly Blue Book trade-in value of about \$86.

Presumably, even that figure has dropped since last week, when my poor baby died in the local Target parking lot and I couldn't get it started again.

I was guessing, based on the sound the car was making when I turned the ignition key, that I had a starter problem. "Starters can be replaced," I thought to myself. "That happened to me once before. A starter issue wouldn't be so bad."

Unfortunately, I should have been thinking in terms of finisher, not starter—because my car wasn't just temporarily dead.

It was dead dead.

You know the news isn't going to be good when the person from the auto repair shop calls and says "you'd better come down here" instead of just telling you what's wrong over the phone. So when my wife Adrienne and I went to see Jess at the shop, I was prepared for the worst.

As my son Theo likes to phrase things: I wasn't wrong.

The car's timing chain had broken, and the engine was destroyed.

The first thing I saw on Jess's lengthy computer screen, then, was a reference to replacing the engine—with a used 2003 Saturn Vue engine with 69,000 miles on it—for the low low price of \$3,688.46.

Or, if we wanted to, Jess said, we

could go with a remanufactured engine for \$5,522.85 ... or \$6,259.64.

Hmm ...

Given its age, of course, the car would need one or two other things as well:

Spark plugs and coil boots—
\$203.60

Water pump—\$147.83

Drive belt—\$36.78

Radiator hoses—\$98.48

Full synthetic oil service—\$50.66

Cooling system flush—\$134.99

Battery—\$184.98

Four new tires—\$587.36

Wheel alignment—\$109

Transmission degrease—\$48.96

Rear shocks—\$353.50

Passenger rear coil spring insulator—\$78.94

Sway bar links—\$266.23

Windshield—\$260

Oh, and the all-important top-off of the windshield wiper fluid for \$3.

(Note: Feel free to silently add the additional phrase "plus tax" to each of these figures, by the way.)



At best, then, it was going to cost us roughly \$6,800 to get this baby back on the road.

Adrienne and I tried—we really did try—to conduct a careful analysis of what we should do. We even went to the coffee shop to talk about it, and we stalled for a few days before I went to see Jess and told her what Adrienne and I could have told her days earlier.

Goodbye, 2003 Saturn Vue.

So now I have a dead black 2003 Saturn Vue sitting in my garage.

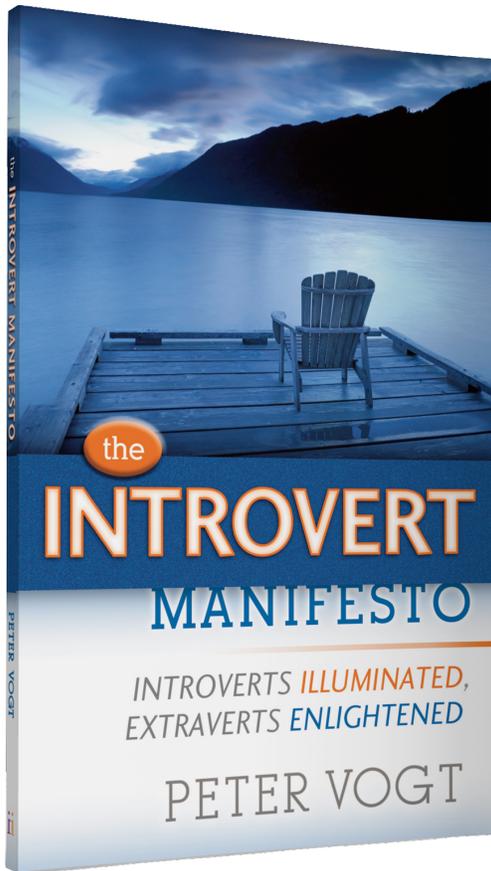
What do you do with a dead Saturn Vue? (Sounds like a dark Dr. Seuss book, does it not?) Well, one of the online we'll-buy-your-car-no-matter-its-condition websites offered me a cool 10 bucks for it.

Tough to turn that one down.

No, I've decided instead to tap my introverted propensities for research and deep engagement: I'll be learning how to disassemble key parts of a 2003 Saturn Vue so that I can sell them on eBay. I'm strangely looking forward to it.

And I'm hoping my baby isn't quite finished after all.

CLARITY



“*The Introvert Manifesto* is the manual [on introverts] that should have come in the box.”

Nancy Ancowitz, author of *Self-Promotion for Introverts* and producer of the “Self-Promotion for Introverts” blog for *Psychology Today*

Read extensive excerpts and order your paperback copy now at:

IntrovertManifesto.com

PRACTICAL RESEARCH

Personality Does Play a Role in the Type of Place You Seek

As you might suspect, your personality—especially your general level of introversion/extraversion—does indeed play a key role in the types of physical places you tend to be drawn to, according to a recent article in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

The article describes a series of three studies that involved a total of about 2,350 students at a large American university.

Each student completed a standard personality test (the Big Five Inventory), then answered short surveys several times a day over a two-week period. The surveys asked the students where they were and how they were feeling in the moment.

The studies' key finding: Different places hold different levels of attraction for people, largely (though not exclusively) depending on how introverted or extraverted they are.

More specifically, the students in the study who were more extraverted spent more time in public places (e.g., coffee shops, bars) compared to the more introverted participants.

"The places we spend time in play such an important part in our everyday lives. Yet for a long time, we didn't have a good understanding of why we prefer certain places over others," says Columbia University management professor Sandra Matz, who conducted the research with Stanford University communication professor Gabriella Harari.

Harari says the research suggests that people may be able to "change

their psychological experiences" by changing their environments.

As the journal article puts it:

"A better understanding of how people's psychology is connected to the physical spaces they inhabit will enable individuals to make the most of their daily experiences by helping them to select environments that fit their dispositions and elicit the psychological states they desire."

Sources: "Personality-Place Transactions: Mapping the Relationships Between Big Five Personality Traits, States, and Daily Places," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (June 4, 2020, advance online publication); Stanford University news release, June 11, 2020.

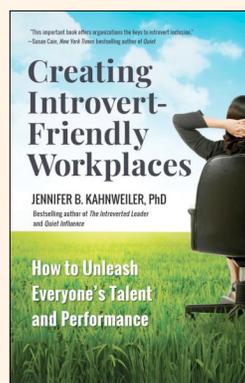
REFLECTIVE READS

A "Playbook" for Harnessing the Superpowers of Introverts

As one of its prepublication reviewers so aptly puts it, *Creating Introvert-Friendly Workplaces* is "a 'playbook' to unlock the superpowers of the introvert at work."

There is perhaps no one better equipped to write such a book than author and leadership speaker Jennifer Kahnweiler, a self-proclaimed extravert and an introvert champion all rolled into one.

Kahnweiler says she "dove into" researching introversion decades ago after she figured out her husband is an introvert. She's been helping or-



ganizations and individuals identify, embrace, and then leverage their introverted strengths ever since.

Creating Introvert-Friendly Workplaces is a continuation of that critical work. The book covers the seven key areas organizations need to ad-

dress to support their introverted employees and help them thrive.

Among those areas: recruiting and hiring great introvert talent, leading introverts, building teams with introversion in mind, and creating training and development strategies that mesh with introverts' styles and preferences.

If you're an introvert in an organizational leadership role—or if you have influence on the leaders in your organization—*Creating Introvert-Friendly Workplaces* is a book you'll want to read and recommend. Its hopeful advocacy, complemented by practical tips, will change your workplace for the better.

Continued from page 1

shouting voices and blaring music.

Every year, I don't really want to go but go anyway—because I love Adrienne and want her to be able to see her friends. (Invariably, by the way, I have a decent time too.)

How come I never want to go to the Beer Tent at Boxcar Days? It has nothing to do with fear, and therefore shyness; I'm not **afraid** of going, thinking I'll look like an idiot or somehow be humiliated.

I'd just rather stay home and read a book, or maybe go for a quiet walk under the stars with my bride.

That's introversion.

Contrast that scenario with my first day of seventh grade, when I instantaneously fall in love from afar with a beautiful girl—a girl I see virtually every school day from then until graduation.

For the next six years, I long to have an actual conversation with this girl, and to ultimately ask her out. But I can't. I'm terrified of how stupid I'll look in her eyes as I babble and stammer, and of how crushing it will be when my crush inevitably sends me packing in utter embarrassment and defeat.

As my date-seeking fantasy plays out, if only in my mind, I'm not matter-of-factly thinking: "I just don't want to invest my energy in this task." No way. What I'm really thinking amounts to a snowball becoming a destructive boulder as it barrels down a steep mountainside:

If I try to ask this girl out, I'm going to go up to her and freeze and not know what to say and then I'll start talking and sound like a fool and then what a dumb ass I'll be and then she'll see what a dumb ass I am and then she'll reject me and then I'll just

keel over and die right there in front of her and then everyone watching will laugh until they burst into flames because I died right in front of everyone trying to ask a girl out.

That's shyness.

The Shy Extravert

You might be an introvert **and** be shy. That's quite common, and it may help explain the frequent misperception that introversion and shyness are the same thing.

But extraverts, it turns out, can be shy too. (Shyness really is a behavioral difficulty, after all, which means anyone can experience it.)

I used to believe the phrase "shy extravert" was an oxymoron.

Then I met one.

A few years ago, at a professional career counselors conference, I attended a session on personality differences. At one point in the workshop, the introversion vs. shyness topic came up, and the presenter noted that extraverts can be shy, just as some introverts are.

As I sat there wrestling with instant cognitive dissonance—and I could tell by other people's reactions that I wasn't alone—a guy across the aisle from me raised his hand so he could speak.

He then stood up and said: "I'm a shy extravert."

And as he talked about what it was like—to constantly **want** to socialize and participate in things but constantly be **afraid** of doing so—he literally started turning red. His face and his ears became crimson testimonies to how petrified he was feeling in that very moment, and the beads of sweat that formed on his forehead told us how determined he was to not only enlighten the rest of us, but also fight off the inclination to stay seated and say nothing.

This man hadn't decided to battle his extraversion. He'd decided to battle his shyness. And for a few moments, he'd won.

If you're a shy introvert, you can do the same. Just remember, though: Your opponent will be your shyness, not your introversion.

Is Shyness Bad?

One of the things that has always bothered me about the introversion vs. shyness discussion is the implication that shyness is bad, or that something is wrong with you if you're shy.

I think this phenomenon gets to me because **introversion** is so often viewed as bad, and we introverts often end up feeling like something is wrong with us—both of which get on my nerves (and compel me to write a monthly newsletter called *Introvert Insights!*).

Is shyness bad? Cooper offers some wise counsel on this one.

"As someone who was extremely shy for most of my life, I think it comes down to this," he writes in another post on his blog: "Shyness is not bad, but it's not helpful either."

"Some people have a mild shyness that doesn't really change their life," he continues. "My shyness was not like that. **My shyness was painful** [emphasis his]. My shyness stopped me from having the life I wanted."

If your shyness is stopping you from having the life you want, work on it. Small steps, taken with the help of a therapist, perhaps, will help you slowly overcome it.

But you don't have to—and you shouldn't—"face" your introversion the way you'd "face" shyness and work to overcome it. Instead, you should simply embrace your introversion as the healthy, natural part of your existence that it really is.



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INTROVERT INSPIRATIONS

"[Y]ou should do things you enjoy, ignoring the social or societal pressure to do all the noisy stuff. Read a book. Meditate. Tend your garden. If that's what makes you happy, go for it. Let the extraverts do their thing."

~ Dan Roberts

"Telling friends and family 'thanks, but no thanks' because you need time to process reality is totally within your rights."

~ Bonnie Burton

"When we're solitary, we have a much better sense of ourselves. We must schedule solo experiences to stay grounded and in-tune with ourselves."

~ Jennifer McCarroll

"Solitude can nourish the qualities of reflection necessary to really listen to another, and in solitude we learn so much about ourselves in relationship to others."

~ Daniel Clement