



# i introvert insights

## When Is Solitude Beneficial? Here's a Four-Point Checklist

By Peter Vogt

Some people will go to considerable lengths to **avoid** true solitude.

Consider the college-student participants in one of the latter of a series of 11 studies whose results were cumulatively published in the journal *Science* (in the July 4, 2014, article “Just Think: The Challenges of the Disengaged Mind”).

The participants' task in Study 10 was to simply sit in a room, alone, for 15 minutes—without their cell-phone, a book, etc.—and just let their mind wander.

The researchers, led by psychologist Timothy Wilson of the University of Virginia, had learned from previous studies in the series that participants often struggled with such an assignment. Maybe, Wilson and his colleagues reasoned, the participants needed a distraction.

So the researchers provided one: a button the participants could push, if they felt like it, to receive a small electric shock from a 9-volt battery.

Wilson et al. let the participants see what the shock felt like before-

hand (thus taking away the novelty aspect). They also gave the students a hypothetical \$5 and asked them how much they'd pay to avoid the shock; most offered a dollar or two.

But when the experiment finally took place, Wilson et al. were, well, shocked by the results: Two-thirds of the men and a quarter of the women opted for a shock at least once.

For some people, it seems, any stimulation is better than nothing at all.

### Solitude Taken Too Far

On the other side of the solitude spectrum you'll find people like the so-called *hikikomori* in Japan (and increasingly, researchers suspect, elsewhere as well), who take solitude way past a healthy level.

According to Japan's Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry, a *hikikomori* is someone who has remained isolated at home for at least six consecutive months without going to work or school, and who rarely interacts with people outside their own immediate family.

October 2020

## INSIDE

Tips, Tricks, and Tools	2
It's an Introvert's Life	4
Practical Research	6
Reflective Reads	6
Introvert Inspirations	8

Continued on page 7

# TIPS, TRICKS, AND TOOLS

## MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

### Tap the Power of Habit to Stay in Phone Touch with Friends

“I really should call [fill in blank with name of friend],” you think to yourself. “It’s been too long.”

Then you find a way not to call.

Sound familiar? You’re in good company.

“Willpower or courage alone is enough to make you reach out to a friend once. But reaching out to people consistently means you’ll need to build a habit,” says writer Francine Mendis, in her recent *Medium* article “Are You Stuck in the Inertia of Introversion?”

You likely mean well when you think about calling your friend. But your desire to conserve your energy too often outflanks your desire to dial your friend’s number.

Mendis gets it. And as an introvert herself, she has a solution for you—a methodical way of staying in phone contact with your friends that she has perfected in her own life.



“Instead of hemming and hawing [about] whether my friend has put her kids to bed yet, and if I should call now or call in an hour, I commit to a day and time to call any friend I haven’t talked to in a while,” Mendis writes.

Every Thursday at 8:30 p.m., Mendis consults her “mental list” of friends she hasn’t talked to lately. She then picks one and calls him/her out of the blue.

“If one friend doesn’t pick up, I go down the list until someone answers,” she says.

“It’s the only process that works.”

It’s not that she doesn’t love her friends, Mendis stresses. (Again, you can probably relate.)

“But between the stressors of life (hello, 2020) and the pull of the inner monologue of the introvert, this habit is what keeps me from falling off the planet.”

## NETWORKING STRATEGIES

### Notes About Your Motivation Will Help You Attend Events

Committing to attend a networking event or a similar get-together is pretty easy when the event is, say, a month away.

But when the day of the event actually arrives, it’s tempting to talk yourself out of going, especially if you’re an introvert. Suddenly your toilet needs immediate cleaning, or you simply must take care of your junk drawer or do your taxes.

That’s why Thea Orozco—an introvert herself and author of *The Introvert’s Guide to the Workplace* (see review on page 6 of this issue)—has developed a clever trick to help herself choose events wisely and then go to them when the time comes.

Before she signs up for an event, she rates it in her mind in terms of “how important or fun the event could be.”

“I don’t RSVP for anything less than a 7 out of 10,” she writes in the book.

And then?

“After I send in the RSVP, I add the event to my calendar, and here’s the important part—I also write down my rating and the reasons for the number.”

These simple notes help her maintain her resolve later on, when she wants to stay home. They can do the same for you.

“When that event comes rolling around...,” Orozco says, “you’ll see right there on your calendar why you signed up in the first place.”

## COMMUNICATION TIPS

### Use “Sandwiching” to Tell People You Need Time Alone

You know full well that you need your alone time as an introvert. But it can be a struggle sometimes to communicate that need to the other people in your life.

Especially—let’s face it—to the extraverts in your life.

But “your introversion is not an affront. It isn’t wrong to tell someone you need space,” writes Texas A&M University student Caylie Evans, in her recent *Introvert, Dear* website article “As an Introvert, My Need for Alone Time Is About Me, Not You.”

“You are who you are,” says Evans, an introvert herself, “and needing more time alone than the person next to you is not a weakness.”

Still—how can you let other people know about that need, especially in the moment when you’re already feeling drained?

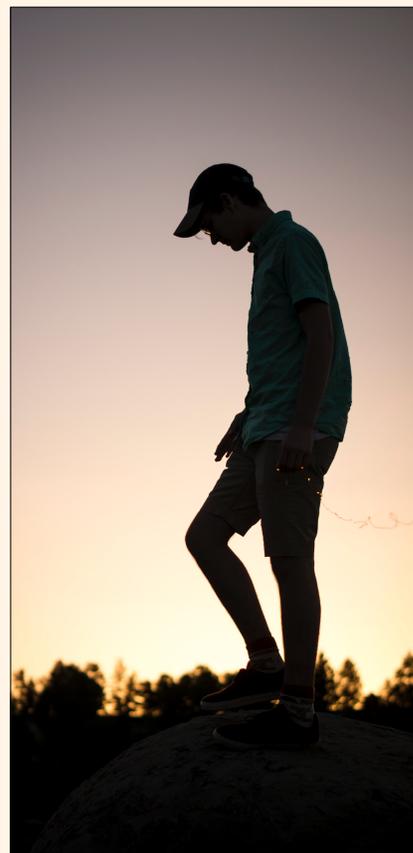
Try “sandwiching,” Evans says.

“This is usually a technique for giving constructive criticism, but I think it applies here as well,” Evans writes.

“Instead of saying ‘I really need some alone time’ and leaving, try validating the person you are with beforehand and afterwards.

“Say ‘I loved hanging out today, but I’m feeling pretty drained and need some alone time. I would love to get together again sometime next week, though.’”

The sandwiching technique “clarifies that you don’t have an issue with the person you are with,” Evans stresses, “and will make both of you happy.”



## CAREER ADVANCEMENT

### Create the Billboard That Effectively Advertises You

You probably see billboards every day, advertising everything from restaurants and hotels to car dealerships and cell phone providers.

But what would the billboard advertising **you** look like?

That’s one of the creative questions author Nancy Ancowitz poses in her thought-provoking book *Self-Promotion for Introverts: The Quiet Guide to Getting Ahead*.

And while she doesn’t suggest that you actually go out and rent your own billboard (“although it might be a novel approach,” she points out), Ancowitz says that imagining what your billboard might say—and how—is a clarifying exercise when it comes to figuring out

how to market yourself and what you’re capable of, whether it’s in the context of a job search, the promotion of your growing business, or related activities.

“If you’re an introvert, the thought of your personal brand plastered on a billboard might seem overwhelming,” Ancowitz concedes.

“However, it can also be liberating to take the time to think of a message that would matter to the people you want to target—rather than dreaming it up on the spot at a social event or important meeting.”

So how do you go about creating your own billboard? Keep it simple and brief, Ancowitz stresses, just like a real billboard has to be. (People speed past billboards, after all.)

First, she says, “Take out a blank sheet of paper and write down a

concise headline for your billboard and draft an image (or find one from a magazine).”

Then, she says, write a short but compelling message for your billboard, “possibly to get members of your target audience who are driving by to take a desired action.”



# IT'S AN INTROVERT'S LIFE

## Yes, Solitude Is an Escape; but It Needs to Be a *Pursuit*, Too

By Peter Vogt

Often, right after our family has finished dinner and the kitchen cleanup has begun, the audio volume in our house seems to double.

I probably don't have to tell you that kids are involved.

Kids are kids, of course, and especially when they are young and forced by ridiculously old-school parents to do actual chores, they—well, they often yell their conversations when merely talking to each other would do just fine.

Why? You gotta be kidding: I have no idea. Situational deafness?

I only know that a) when I was a kid, my siblings and I did it too (sorry, Mom and Dad); b) the same is undoubtedly true in other families; and c) all I can think about when it happens now is getting away from it.

Fast.

So I typically retreat to the bedroom for a bit, closing the door behind me, perhaps working on a crossword puzzle, and hoping not to get caught.

It's a form of alone time that is the equivalent of direct pressure on a wound to stop the bleeding: It's helpful, and it's important; but it's not exactly satisfying, and it certainly isn't chosen.

Contrast that scenario with a very different form of alone time—the kind of alone time that revitalizes.

I just got back from a silent, 15-minute lunchtime walk around the block. I was all by myself, cell phone left purposely at home. The weather

outside is making a comeback from temperatures that have been unseasonably cold, so my walk was a true walk—an easy stroll—and not the wind-blown sprint between snow flurries that we've had to settle for the last week or so.

When I got to the final corner before turning back toward my house, my mind kept telling me “just keep going instead!” But alas, there's a newsletter to write.

So here I am.

Now, though, I sit here refreshed and renewed. The headache I had before lunch is gone. I'm thinking more clearly, despite my sleep being a little rough last night. The words are flowing more freely from my fingers than they were just an hour ago.

Everything's just ... better. Not merely stabilized. Better.

Not all alone time is created equal, it turns out. As Durham University (United Kingdom) researcher Thuy-vy Nguyen and her colleagues have found in studies conducted over the last several years, a personality characteristic known as *dispositional autonomy* combines with introversion (and extraversion, for that matter) to determine how you feel about solitude and what you end up getting out of it.

Dispositional autonomy is a fancy name for believing you have a choice when it comes to managing your daily experiences.

“People with an autonomous personality [i.e., dispositional autonomy] feel that they have chosen to do what they're doing, instead of



seeing themselves as pawns at the mercy of the external environment,” Nguyen writes in her recent *Aeon* website article “Time Alone (Chosen or Not) Can Be a Chance to Hit the Reset Button.”

“[W]hen we created a manipulation in the lab where some people were forced into experiencing solitude (thus reducing their sense of autonomy) and others were invited to take interest in it and try it out (fostering their autonomy),” Nguyen continues, “those who were forced into solitude saw less value in experiencing it and, in turn, derived less enjoyment from it.”

You won't always be able to get **chosen** alone time, of course. Sometimes, living in the real world, you won't be able to get alone time of any sort.

But you can work on building up your reserves. So consciously **pursue** solitude whenever and wherever and however you can, even if it's only for a few minutes at a time.

You'll enjoy it so much more—and get far more out of it—when it's a pursuit, not an escape.

# OWN IT

## THE INTROVERT'S *Bill of Rights*

**I HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMAIN SILENT** ~ not because I've been accused of some crime, but because silence is no crime. Sometimes I just don't want to talk, or be talked to. Other times I'm simply listening silently, contemplating silently, or recharging silently. Silence doesn't hurt; it helps.

**I HAVE THE RIGHT TO SEEK SOLITUDE** ~ to find or create the revitalizing alone time I need to stay psychologically, emotionally, spiritually, socially, and physically healthy in our frenzied, stressful world. My alone time isn't about rejecting anyone; it's about protecting myself.

**I HAVE THE RIGHT TO CONTEMPLATE** ~ to take all the time I need to choose my words, weigh my decisions, and consider my actions ~ before I act (so I can prepare), after (so I can change course if necessary), or both. I am, therefore I think.

**I HAVE THE RIGHT TO SEEK DEPTH** ~ genuine substance and significance in my conversations, my activities, and my relationships. Small talk, shallow pursuits, and superficial people leave me unsatisfied and wanting. I need real human beings with real talk and real pursuits.

**I HAVE THE RIGHT TO FOCUS INTENTLY** ~ to avoid multitasking, interruptions, and haste so I can concentrate solely on whatever or whoever is right in front of me. The next thing can wait.

**I HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE HEARD** ~ to be truly listened to and understood ~ minus multitasking, interruptions, and haste ~ not because I'm more important or deserving than other people, but because I'm equally important and deserving.

**I HAVE THE RIGHT TO SHARE WHAT I WANT, WHEN I WANT, HOW I WANT** ~ to decide for myself, without pressure or judgment, what to say, when to say it, and how to say it. My thoughts, feelings, and expressions are mine first ~ and last if I so choose.

**I HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE SEEN AS PERFECTLY NORMAL** ~ or at least as normal as the extraverts of the world. My introversion isn't a character flaw or a malady to be cured, not any more than extraversion. It's a healthy, natural part of who I am.

**I HAVE THE RIGHT NOT TO DEFEND MYSELF** ~ to let my introversion stand without justification or apology. I don't expect the extraverts of the world to explain how they tick; I don't have to explain how I tick either.

**I HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE DEFINED BY WHAT I AM, NOT WHAT I AM NOT** ~ by my many natural strengths, not by what others may perceive as shortcomings; by what I have to offer, not by what others think I lack or need to work on. I'm not an extravert wannabe; I'm an introvert.

From *The Introvert Manifesto: Introverts Illuminated, Extraverts Enlightened*

[IntrovertManifesto.com](http://IntrovertManifesto.com)

Copyright © 2014-2015, Peter Vogt. All rights reserved.

Order your 11x17-inch, glossy poster now at:

**[IntrovertInsights.com/Shop](http://IntrovertInsights.com/Shop)**

# PRACTICAL RESEARCH

## Device Usage During Solitude Seems to Temper Its Benefits

Do you lose some of the potential benefits of solitude if you spend your alone time not “truly alone” with your thoughts, but instead on your electronic device, texting people and engaging with social media?

Among emerging adults (i.e., 18-to-25-year-olds), the answer points to yes, according to a recent study in the journal *Psychology of Popular Media*.

The research involved 69 college students, who began the study by completing a battery of psychological measures, including a personality assessment and assessments of their preferences for and motivations for pursuing solitude.

Then, seven times a day for seven

straight days, the students were surveyed about their current mood, their current alone status and preference, and their social media usage in the moment.

In analyzing the resulting data they gathered, the researchers noted that the study participants clustered into three broad groups: extraverts, “high-functioning introverts,” and “low-functioning introverts.”

The “low-functioning introverts” were labeled as such because they spent the most solitude time on social media; scored higher on measures of loneliness and non-self-determined solitude; and scored lower on identity development, autonomy, and positive relationships with other people.

The “high-functioning introverts,” on the other hand, were sig-

nificantly more likely to spend their alone time “truly alone”—i.e., not texting etc. on a device. They also scored lower on measures of loneliness and higher on identity development, autonomy, and positive relationships with other people.

“[O]ur findings lend support to ... concerns about the psychological cost of social media use,” the researchers conclude, “and suggest that emerging adults who spend their solitude mostly or totally on social media rather than periodically being **truly alone** are not reaping all of the benefits of solitude.”

**Source:** “Alone and Online: Understanding the Relationships Between Social Media, Solitude, and Psychological Adjustment,” *Psychology of Popular Media* (April 9, 2020—advance online publication).

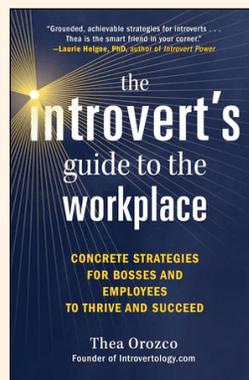
# REFLECTIVE READS

## Introvert’s Guide Challenges Assumptions on Introversion

*The Introvert’s Guide to the Workplace* more than lives up to its subtitle: “Concrete Strategies for Bosses and Employees to Thrive and Succeed.” The book is packed with realistic advice.

But author Thea Orozco stresses, rightly, that the book goes beyond practical tips. It’s also, she says, “about questioning what we’ve been told about ourselves [as introverts] and the ways we need to show up and behave,” particularly on the job.

A faulty “mental autofill,” Orozco argues, has distorted how we feel



and think about ourselves as introverts—and how society at large views introverts as well.

“An autofill is when you go to the checkout page of an online store and you find your name and address are already filled in,” Orozco writes.

“It’s different from an autocompletable, which is what happens when a search engine into which you are entering keywords provides suggestions as you type.”

**Mental** autofills, Orozco says, offer not mere suggestions but powerful declarations; they define—usually without being challenged—how the world (supposedly) works.

In the case of introversion, the typical mental autofill is usually something along the lines of “bad” and “must be fixed.”

No, Orozco stresses.

The true mental autofill for your introversion should be “normal” and “needs to be harnessed.”

Continued from page 1

A nationwide study released by Japan's Cabinet Office in March 2019 estimated that around 613,000 Japanese citizens between the ages of 40 and 64 are hikikomori. That figure surpassed the 541,000 number (among people ages 15 to 39) that the Cabinet Office had estimated in a 2015 survey.

### Keep the 4 “Ifs” in Mind

If you're like most people, you fall somewhere between these two extremes where your pursuit of solitude is concerned.

But if you're an introvert in particular, you likely do sometimes ask yourself (or perhaps face the question from others in your life): What separates healthy solitude from unhealthy solitude? Where does beneficial bleed into detrimental?

In his foreword to the 2014 text *The Handbook of Solitude*, University of Maryland developmental psychologist Kenneth Rubin offers a roadmap that will help you answer this question for yourself.

Think, he says, in terms of four “ifs.” Solitude “can be productive,” he writes:

**1) If you're spending time alone voluntarily.** Alone time you choose is fundamentally different from alone time that is somehow forced upon you, Rubin suggests.

Several studies since 2014 have borne this idea out—notably, a 2018 *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* study (see the November 2018 issue of *Introvert Insights*, page 6), which found that participants who had pursued solitude, for intrinsic reasons, got more out of it than participants who were told they had to spend time by themselves.

**2) If you can join a social group when you want to.** There's a distinction to be made, Rubin suggests, between having a social group(s) in your life and opting to spend time away from it vs. having no social group(s) at all, and thus practically defaulting to isolation.

If you're taking some time alone knowing full well you can get together with people whenever you're ready, you're in good shape.

If the opposite is true, you may have a problem on your hands, if not now then eventually.

**3) If you can regulate your emotions—particularly social fears and anger—effectively.** Does solitude

generally help you feel better, or worse? Does it help you process your thoughts and feelings effectively, or does it leave you ruminating endlessly about what's wrong in your life, personally and/or socially?

Healthy solitude gives you a psychological and emotional boost. Unhealthy solitude, not so much.

**4) If you're able “to initiate and maintain positive, supportive relationships with others.”** Being alone because you can't, or don't try to, build close relationships with other people is different than taking some time alone—again, by choice (see No. 1)—to think or to focus or to recharge, or all three.

Forgoing relationships is not the same as temporarily stealing away to sit with your thoughts and feelings in relative silence.

The bottom line on solitude, then, writer Brent Crane summarizes in his 2017 *Atlantic* article “The Virtues of Isolation,” is this:

*“The difference between solitude as rejuvenation and solitude as suffering is the quality of self-reflection that one can generate while in it, and the ability to come back to social groups when one wants to.”*





1036 38th Street South  
Moorhead, MN 56560 USA

### Get *Introvert Insights* in the Mail Each Month—Free!

If you'd like to receive your own copy of *Introvert Insights* each month, via good old postal mail, sign up at:

**IntrovertInsights.com**

Yes, it really is a printed publication you can hold in your hands.

Yes, it really is free.

No, there is no "catch."

We'll use the information you supply only for *Introvert Insights* purposes. We will never share it. With anyone.



Editor and Publisher:  
Peter Vogt, M.S.  
peter@introvertinsights.com



*Introvert Insights* is published monthly by Introvert Insights, LLC, 1036 38th Street South, Moorhead, MN 56560.

**IntrovertInsights.com**

Copyright © 2020,  
Introvert Insights, LLC.  
All rights reserved.

## INTROVERT INSPIRATIONS

“Don't think of being an introvert as having a problem, because it's not. It's an essential part of who you are. So know your value and do some self-care when you need it. Take the time you need to decompress and recharge.”

~ James Hambrick

“Introverts aren't anti-social. Rather, they're social in very controlled ways.”

~ Krystal D'Costa

“Find peace in the silence. For introverts, there are no awkward silences—they take their time to connect with like-minded dreamers.”

~ Mia Brox

“Let's thank extraverts for adding their flare to the world. But it's time to take our place. The value introverts provide to the world is underappreciated and our potential underestimated.”

~ Jessica Pedraza