



# i introvert insights

## The Primary Cause of “Zoom Fatigue”? *Nonverbal Overload*

By Peter Vogt

Like millions of others over the past year or so, Stanford University communication professor Jeremy Bailenson has developed a love-hate relationship with videoconferencing platforms like Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams.

In a global pandemic that has redefined the concept of “getting together,” the connecting power of Zoom et al. has in many ways been a godsend, says Bailenson, founding director of Stanford’s Virtual Human Interaction Lab.

But we’re also paying a considerable psychological price for that benefit, Bailenson suggests, too often finding ourselves trapped in a hazy, drained state generically referred to as “Zoom fatigue.”

What exactly is behind Zoom fatigue? Bailenson has been pondering that question, and he offers his theories—and suggested mitigations—in his recent *Technology, Mind, and Behavior* journal article “Nonverbal Overload: A Theoretical Argument

for the Causes of Zoom Fatigue.”

It all boils down to the concept that is the article’s main title, Bailenson says: *nonverbal overload*, stemming from four key aspects of videoconferencing “that exhaust the human mind and body,” according to a Stanford news release on Bailenson’s piece and its ideas.

### Close-Ups Are Intense

Whenever you’re participating in a video discussion, you’re engaging in more close-up eye contact than usual, Bailenson says.

Think of a normal in-person meeting: Your eyes likely bounce around as they look at the speaker, your notes, the rest of the room.

Not so on video calls, where everybody is looking at everybody all the time.

Moreover, the faces you see on videoconferencing calls can feel too close for comfort, Bailenson says; our caveman brains tell us that such a situation could lead to conflict.

“What’s happening, in effect, when you’re using Zoom for many,

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## 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

## MANAGING YOUR ENERGY

### “Pre-Charge” Your Social Battery Before Group Events

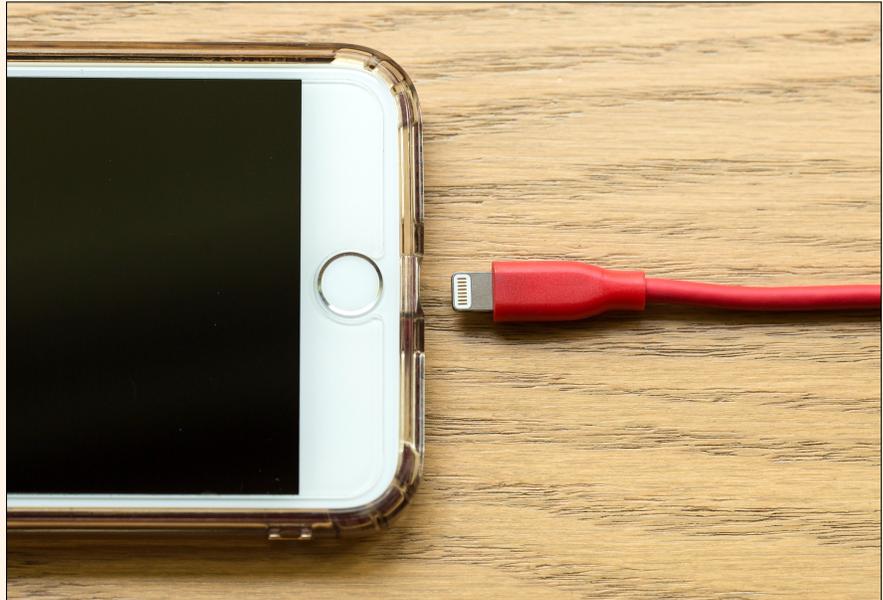
Got a big social event coming up? If so, “pre-charge” your social battery by scheduling yourself some downtime beforehand, suggests writer and teacher Drew Kimble, author of the book *Quiet Impact: A Creative Introvert’s Guide to the Art of Getting Noticed*.

“This usually means finding some quiet, solitary activity to do before your planned event,” writes Kimble.

“This can not only help you relax and distract yourself from any anxiety you might be feeling, but it will also help preserve your social battery for later.”

Suppose, Kimble writes, that you will soon be attending a large conference, and you know you’ll be among hundreds of people for several hours.

“[I]nstead of having breakfast at the crowded hotel restaurant,” Kimble says, “you might consider ordering room service or [taking] a quiet walk to a nearby diner.”



Depending on the weather, you could also go for a walk or a run, Kimble notes, so that you have private time to organize your thoughts, decide who you want to interact with, and perhaps even plan for mini-breaks during the day.

“Even if there’s nowhere to go,” Kimble stresses, “just taking a few laps around the parking lot is usually a far better option than sitting in a

bustling hotel lobby.”

“If the weather is not agreeable,” he adds, “I’ll often run/walk the stairs, swim in the pool, or visit the hotel fitness center and hop on the treadmill.

“Not only does the exercise help distract me and work off some of my nervous energy, but, depending on the time of day, these places are often uncrowded as well.”

## COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

### Tell Your Colleagues What Your Social Preferences Are

As an introvert, you know that social interactions at work—even positive ones—are typically going to drain you; to you, it’s so self-evident that it seems obvious.

The people around you, however, may have no idea—unless you tell them, writes blogger Sarra Bouzid, in her recent post “5 Tips for Introverts to Manage Their Energy.”

“Don’t assume that people will hear you out when all you do is repeat the words over and over in your head, ‘I need quiet time alone to focus on the job. I can’t work properly when someone is standing over my head. I don’t like working in an open office space!’” Bouzid writes.

“The only way for you to lessen the effect of . . . social interactions is to communicate your need for quiet and time alone.”

You need to be outwardly clear,

Bouzid stresses: You have to **tell** people about your social preferences so that you get what you need without inviting misunderstandings.

“Be literal,” Bouzid says, “and you’ll be surprised that most people will respect your wish.

“Tell them you’re going somewhere quiet in the office to work comfortably, or that you’re going to close the door to work on something and that you’d appreciate not being disturbed.”

## Give Your Work the “Voice” It Needs to Be Appreciated

If you’re like many introverts, you secretly (or not so secretly!) believe that your work speaks for itself—or that it **should**, at least.

You shouldn’t have to blab on and on about it, you reason, or tout it, or paint a verbal picture of it, or “promote” it in some way.

You’re not wrong, exactly.

But unfortunately, says leadership coach Beki Fraser, if your work has no “voice”—a voice that only you can give it—it’s far too easy for it to go unnoticed. And for **you** to go unnoticed with it.

“You may be underappreciated

and overlooked because you don’t share your work and get support for your ideas as you go along,” Fraser writes in her recent *Business Insider* article “If Your Successes Often Go Unnoticed at Work, Here Are 3 Ways to Speak Up and Get Credit, According to an HR Expert.”

“You may also become frustrated,” Fraser adds, “when people don’t embrace your solutions and recommendations—which were carefully constructed, but may seem to have come out of left field when they are finally unveiled to your stakeholders.”

The solution, Fraser says, is to actively give your work the voice it needs—even if doing so might go

against your natural grain.

Your work “relies on you to share its value,” Fraser says. “Think of it like an uninterpreted data set that needs to be organized into a story to be understood and appreciated.

“When you keep that story to yourself, no one sees the value you create, and your work won’t achieve its full potential.”

So share your thoughts with your colleagues, perhaps through a detailed email. Commit to offering regular updates.

“This,” Fraser says, “will keep your work top-of-mind among stakeholders, make them part of the project, and build understanding and buy-in.”

## CONSUMER SAVVY

### Buying a Car? Buy Yourself Time to Make Good Decisions

One of the hardest aspects of shopping for a car, be it new or used, is feeling like you’re on the spot—like the seller is pressuring you to make an instant decision when the introvert in you is screaming “take your time, take your time!”

You **can** take your time—and you should, says car technician and writer Sibin Spasojevic, in his recent

DespairRepair.com website article “How to Talk Down a Car Dealer—10 Tips for Introverts.”

But to do that, Spasojevic says, you need to **buy** yourself time—by reminding yourself that less (talk) is more in your initial interactions with the seller.

“During those conversations,” Spasojevic stresses, “don’t promise anything.”

Instead, he writes, use delaying expressions like these:

*“Thanks. I’ll see.”*

*“If I make up my mind, I’ll call.”*

*“Thank you for the explanation.”*

*“Thanks for your time.”*

The idea, says Spasojevic, is to fend off the possibility of buying a car out of guilt.

Maybe you liked the seller’s presentation, for example, and you appreciate how the seller is treating you. So you may be tempted to go ahead with the purchase even though you don’t particularly like the car itself.

Stop yourself—by using one of the delaying expressions.

“In the world of car buying, a weak promise is forgotten in a matter of days,” Spasojevic stresses, “while a bad purchase is something you’ll have to live with for years to come.”



# IT'S AN INTROVERT'S LIFE

## A Quiet(er) “Drive Time” Allows Ideas to Hop in for the Ride

By Peter Vogt

In the radio industry, *drive time* refers to the hectic, overstimulating morning and evening hours when you commute to and from work, whether it's in your own vehicle or via public transportation.

Radio stations, especially larger-market operations on the FM side of the dial, use this time to offer up hectic, overstimulating programming (think “\_\_\_ and \_\_\_ in the Morning!” or “Traffic on the 8's!”) that feeds on itself—and you—to perpetuate a hectic, overstimulating environment. One we are too quick to accept as normal; as the only way.

It isn't.

My family and I just returned from a long road trip to Texas. I drove most of the 3,274 miles and 47 hours of it.

And I did the whole thing on my version of drive time: without listening to the radio ... or to music ... or to a podcast ... or to anything else but the silence, not counting of course the times when my wife and I were chatting.

What do you get from this introvert's version of drive time?

At first, nothing. I stared at the road for the first few hours, letting my mind drift as I always do and waiting for the ideas to appear. But nothing was showing up.

I have learned from experience, though, to be patient with this process, and to not try too hard. “Just wait, Pete,” I kept telling myself. “Just wait.”

And then ...

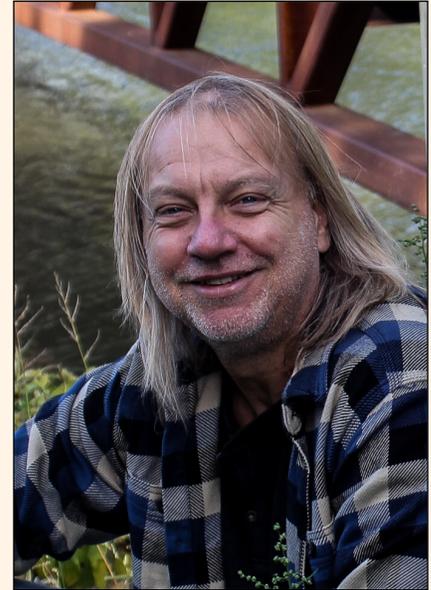
A story idea sprouted from the blackened spring soil of a Nebraska farm field.

And an insight merged into my lane on the Kansas Turnpike.

And a to-do list item bubbled from the ground underneath an Oklahoma oil well.

And, ironically, a new observation fought its way into my brain in the midst of a hectic, overstimulating Fort Worth, Texas traffic jam.

**Your** drive time doesn't have to be the radio industry's version of drive time. You can't avoid traffic, of course, or the “gawker delay” of a freeway accident, but you can decide



to make your drive time as silent and peaceful as you possibly can—especially inside the car.

So turn your radio off sometimes.

Let the music go quiet.

Listen to the podcast later.

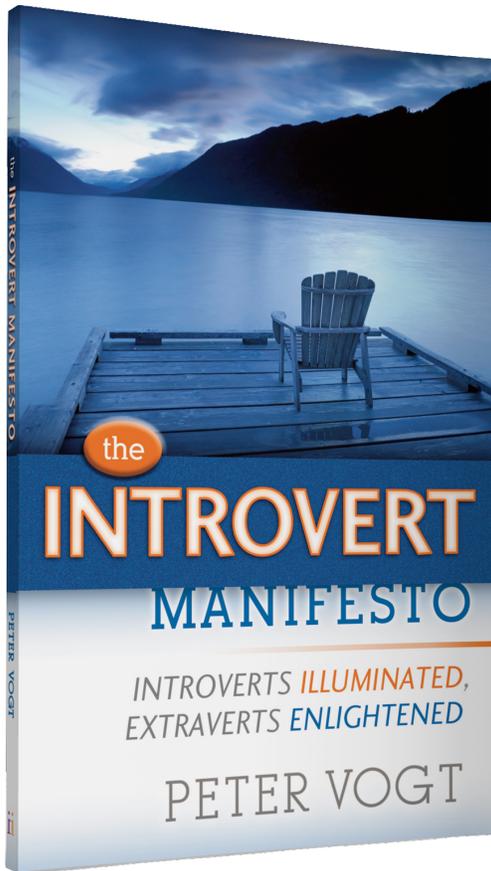
Enjoy the silence once in a while, and let it work its magic.

If you're not used to it, it might throw you for a while. Your brain might react to the (near) silence by creating its own hectic, overstimulating environment.

But before long, your brain will realize that you've given it permission to be what it's meant to be—the insight- and idea-producing miracle that works wonders in blissful quiet.



# BE YOU



“*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](http://IntrovertManifesto.com)**

# PRACTICAL RESEARCH

## Don't Dismiss the Potential Benefits of Group Interactions

Compared to your extraverted counterparts, you as an introvert are more apt to be distressed about an upcoming group activity—and to perhaps even avoid it unnecessarily when it might help you, suggests a recent article in the journal *Personality and Individual Differences*.

The article describes two related studies conducted by Andrew Spark and Peter O'Connor of Queensland University of Technology.

In the studies, college students completed measures of extraversion and neuroticism. They also filled out a *forecasted affect* questionnaire that asked them how they anticipated they would feel during a 20-minute group problem solving exercise that

would soon follow. (For example, were they “happy” thinking about the activity? “worried”?)

Spark and O'Connor found that extraversion was the dominant predictor of both forecasted **positive** affect (i.e., a prediction that one would have positive feelings during the upcoming activity) and forecasted **negative** affect (i.e., a prediction that one would have negative feelings during the upcoming activity).

Previous research findings suggest “that the appraisal of future events in terms of emotional tone originating in the prefrontal cortex may be more negative for introverted individuals,” Spark and O'Connor note.

That evidence, combined with their own findings, in turn suggests that “the presence of negative forecasts in introverts may reduce their

approach behavior when such behavior might actually be beneficial,” Spark and O'Connor write.

“Such individuals may therefore be at greater risk of certain psychological distress syndromes” (e.g., depression, anxiety) and “undesirable social outcomes,” Spark and O'Connor conclude.

A potential preventative measure: “manipulating” your forecasted negative affect with respect to upcoming social situations—i.e., thinking not only about their potential downsides, but their potential upsides as well.

**Source:** “Extraversion Rather Than Neuroticism Is the Dominant Trait Predictor of Forecasted Affect in Relation to Social Situations,” *Personality and Individual Differences*, 160 (July 1, 2020 — online).

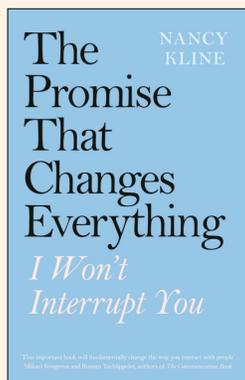
# REFLECTIVE READS

## “I Won't Interrupt You”: How to Unleash Independent Thinking

*The Promise That Changes Everything* illustrates, and advocates for, the power of **not** interrupting.

Promise someone you won't interrupt them while they're talking, for example—then follow through—and you'll unleash in them the kind of “generative” independent thinking that leads to potentially life-altering insights, says author Nancy Kline, who studies what prevents us from thinking for ourselves.

The same works in reverse for you too, of course: If someone you're interacting with promises not



to interrupt **you** (and doesn't), **your** thinking goes to new places.

“The ignition of independent thinking happens inside us when we experience attention and **know** we will not be interrupted,” Kline says.

“It is the **knowing**, the promise,

that produces the trust that produces the courage that produces our new thinking.”

Not interrupting someone, of course, is far easier said than done. As Kline herself points out: “We think [interrupting] is the right thing to do. We really do.” We're proving that we're listening, we mistakenly believe. We're helping!

No. Actually, we are stifling, Kline says—smothering independent thinking before it can take root and blossom.

So what can, and what should, we do instead? The answer is “embarrassingly simple,” Kline says.

“Be present and don't speak.”

Continued from page 1

many hours is you're in this hyper-aroused state," Bailenson notes.

**Possible solution:** Take Zoom (or whatever program you're using) out of the full-screen option and reduce the size of the Zoom window relative to the monitor so that people's face sizes are minimized.

### Seeing Yourself Is Tiring

Most video platforms allow you to see a little square of yourself on camera as you participate.

This feature, too, is unnatural, Bailenson says.

"In the real world, if somebody was following you around with a mirror constantly—so that while you were talking to people, making decisions, giving feedback, getting feedback, you were seeing yourself in a mirror—that would just be crazy. No one would ever consider that," Bailenson says.

Yet it is commonplace in online meetings; practically the default.

It doesn't have to be.

**Possible solution:** Look for a "hide self-view" (or similarly named) button on your videoconferencing platform and use it when you need a break from your own face.

### It's Hard to Be Immobile

If you're having an in-person meeting, or even if you're simply talking to others on the phone, you usually have at least a little leeway to move around.

It's pretty routine, for example, to get up in a meeting room and grab a glass of water or a cup of coffee in the midst of an interaction.

But you can't really do that in your online meetings; most cameras have a set field of view, which means you have to stay in place in a way that is, once again, unnatural.

**Possible solution:** Bailenson suggests giving more thought to your videoconferencing room and setup.

Can you position the camera differently to give yourself more flexibility for movement? Could you use an external keyboard so you can sit farther from your computer screen?

### "Cognitive Load" Is High

In face-to-face conversations, Bailenson points out, nonverbal communication comes quite easily; we effortlessly spot, and interpret, gestures and nonverbal cues.

But in video chats, Bailenson says, we have to work harder—and therefore **think** harder—than usual.

"You've got to make sure that your head is framed within the center of the video," Bailenson says. "If you want to show someone that you are agreeing with them, you have to do an exaggerated nod or put your thumbs up.

"That adds *cognitive load*, as you are using mental calories in order to communicate."

**Possible solution:** During online meetings, give yourself periodic "audio only" breaks, Bailenson says, when you not only shut off your camera but also turn your body away from the screen.

These little pauses, along with the other strategies Bailenson suggests, will help keep nonverbal overload—and Zoom fatigue—in check.





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## INTROVERT INSPIRATIONS

“Imagine if you, too, built a career that focused on embracing your introversion so that you can do your best work and [be] both happier and healthier. Seriously, you do you! Don't try to fit a square peg into a round hole and expect to keep your peace or to produce your best work. Build your career around your introversion and you'll start thriving.”

~ Camille Tintle

“[T]here is power in being quiet when everyone else is talking!”

~ Jessica Williamson

“Introverts are just as valuable, powerful, and worthy of being heard as extraverts. By working on techniques to use your introvert personality to your advantage, you'll soon realize that you don't have to be loud to have your ideas heard.”

~ Gini Beqiri

“[T]o my fellow introverts (in the words of a wise friend): You are destined for way more than the world lets you believe!”

~ Hira Mohibullah