



i introvert i insights

Get—or Find—a Job to Make Social Events More Satisfying

By Peter Vogt

When I moved to Minneapolis from Madison, Wisconsin, in 1999, I wanted to find a job in the field I was pursuing at the time: career counseling—specifically, working as a counselor in a college or university career center.

In graduate school, I had learned the importance of joining, and participating in, professional associations in one's field, particularly when you're looking for a job in that field. So I dutifully tracked down information about the Minnesota Career Development Association (MCDA) and attended its spring statewide conference in St. Paul.

I say that like it was simple. It was not.

While it's probably too strong to say that I **forced** myself to go the conference, I didn't exactly revel in the idea either. I really didn't know anyone in the group, and those few people I did know were nothing more than passing acquaintances.

So let's just say I had to talk myself into going to the event. And

then I had to talk myself into talking to other people once I was there.

And then I had to talk myself into the hardest task of all: asking to join an already-established table group during the chicken alfredo lunch.

I managed; you do what you have to do, right? Especially when you're an introvert, as I am, and events of any kind tend to drain you.

As often happens, I ended up enjoying myself at the conference despite my initial reservations. So when the organization was seeking volunteers a few months later to help organize the **next** spring's statewide conference, I signed up.

That's when—and how—I discovered a key introvert trick that I use to this day in pretty much any type of social event where I might initially feel uncomfortable.

I get—or find/create—a job.

No, not that kind of job (i.e., a paid job, like the one I was looking for in 1999). I mean a job in terms of a **task** you're given, or one you take on, at any type of group social function you're a part of.

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TIPS, TRICKS, AND TOOLS

NETWORKING IDEAS

At Networking Events, Dig to Uncover Commonalities

If you're an introvert, it's practically a given that a networking event will wear you out, especially if you don't really know anyone there.

But career coach and personal branding expert Anish Majumdar says you can make such events more gratifying—and less taxing—by focusing on what you have in common with fellow participants and building one-to-one conversations around those commonalities.

“Nothing drains an introvert's energy quite like group networking. So toss it out!” Majumdar writes in an IvyExec.com website article entitled “The Introvert's Guide to Networking While Trying to Find a New Job.”

“It's not your job to convince everyone you're great—your job is to find fellow members of your tribe,” Majumdar stresses.



How? By purposefully adopting a sort of detective mindset—one that says, in effect, “I'm determined to find out what experiences or interests I share with other people at this gathering.”

The connections you uncover don't have to be particularly strong, or even current.

“For example, if you've worked

at the same organization—even if it happened years apart—this can be a good conversation starter,” Majumdar says.

You can also talk about shared group affiliations and shared membership in professional organizations, Majumdar says, not to mention college or university alumni/ae connections.

WORK STRATEGIES

Use “The Rule of 4” to Protect Your Best Deep-Work Time

We might as well accept it: Our brains have only around four hours a day of deep-thinking work in them, says writer Jessica Stillman, who has looked closely at the science around the topic.

“Sure, you can work your way through mindless admin or assembly-line labor for far longer, but when it comes to concentrated intellectual effort, humans face a hard biological limit,” Stillman

writes in a recent article on the Inc.com website.

So when you're planning your days, Stillman says, use what she calls “The Rule of 4” for your most-critical tasks: “[P]ick your four golden hours and protect them like a mama grizzly bear.”

Those hours may be different for you than for someone else; you may do your best work between, say, 8 a.m. and noon, while a colleague hits his/her deep-work “zone” between 1 and 5 p.m.

Whatever the case, know—and

accept—that four hours is your max. Don't extend it, Stillman stresses. And don't, she adds, “try to stretch it over eight (or more) distracted hours; that won't work either.”

“Focusing on your four core hours should help you get more done with less aggravation,” Stillman says.

“It should also help you stop beating yourself up when your brain just won't produce any meaningful insights after 4 p.m., even though there are dozens more items on your to-do list.”

Breaking a Long Period of Radio Silence? Just Be Honest

You keep meaning to reconnect with that old friend of yours after months or even years of radio silence. But somehow the anxiety—maybe even the guilt—involved gets the best of you, and you consistently find ways not to follow through.

Be kind to yourself; you're only human, and many people (introverts and extraverts alike) struggle with the same thing.

But what if you really do want to re-establish that relationship now? How do you explain being so out of touch for so long?

Honesty and sincerity are the way to go, according to the recent 16Personalities.com website article "Keeping in Touch When You're an Introvert: Breaking the Curse of the Familiar Stranger."

"[W]hile introverts may be tempted to list all of the day-to-day inconveniences that prevented them from reconnecting—or come up with a

pretext, no matter how flimsy, for contacting the person—it's best to avoid these tactics," the article says.

"Long-winded explanations of how busy one has been can ring false, only reinforcing the idea that this person is low on the introvert's list of priorities, while artificial pretexts may cause the other person to feel disposable, even used."

Honesty, on the other hand—in combination with a straightforward apology and an acknowledgment of your shortcomings in maintaining connections—will help you re-establish the relationship without sacrificing the mutual dignity and respect that likely helped spark it in the first place.

"A friend who was once close should know you well enough to understand that there was no personal slight intended," the article says, "and before you know it, the shared interests and histories that made you close before will quickly make you forget the time that has passed since you last spoke."

Once you have reconnected with someone, switch over to a prevention mindset, the article says. For example: Get into the (new) habit of texting/emailing the person a bit more often, or writing on his/her social media feeds.

"While a single text here or a quick comment there might not sound like much, it may be just enough to break the cycle of the familiar stranger before it starts."



RELATIONSHIPS

Talk About Your Introversion as Your First Date Approaches

Ultimately, you want to be yourself in a relationship; you want to be the introvert you are instead of trying to be someone you're not.

That resolve should be top of mind—and something you communicate—before (and during) first dates, says marriage and family therapist Gabrielle Applebury.

"When it comes to dating as an introvert, the best thing you can do is be honest with your date ... about your likes and needs," says Applebury, in her LoveToKnow.com web-

site article "Introvert Dating Tips for Comfort and Confidence."

"That way," she stresses, "you'll know quickly if you are compatible with each other."

How, specifically, can you "be honest with your date"?

For starters, you might tell him/her beforehand that, as an introvert, you're a bit quiet at first until you feel more comfortable with a person.

"For instance, you may say: 'I just wanted to touch base with you before we meet and let you know I may come across as shy or standoffish during our date, but I'm just slow to warm,'" Applebury says.

You can also talk about the type of date venue(s) you're most comfortable with, and why, as it relates to your introverted personality.

"You can say: 'During first dates, I tend to get overwhelmed in super loud or crowded group settings. Would you like to have a picnic in the park or meet at a coffee shop instead of going to a bar?'" Applebury suggests.

Your dates aren't all about you, of course. But they're not all about the other person either.

"Dating," Applebury says, "just like being in a relationship, can be filled with compromises."

IT'S AN INTROVERT'S LIFE

You Can Intentionally *Unfocus* Sometimes to Unleash Ideas

By Peter Vogt

My wife doesn't know it yet—I haven't told her—but she will soon be writing a book about her eye-opening experiences this past year teaching kindergarten online.

I came up with the idea just this morning, standing in the magic place where so many of my ideas emerge: the shower.

Adrienne's book will chronicle her experiences adapting to—and ultimately embracing—what was for her and most everyone else a brand new way of educating (and, in the case of the students, being educated). It will cover the surprising number of ups, the inevitable downs, and the lessons Adrienne has learned that she herself, as well as other educators and even society at large, can benefit from.

I even have a title for the book—*Schooled* (get it?)—as well as a subtitle: *What Online Teaching and Learning Has Taught Me—and Can Teach the Rest of Us—About In-Person Teaching and Learning*.

(Sorry about the long subtitle, hon—it's a mouthful—but ... here you go. You're welcome!)

I'm (half) kidding about all of this, of course; Adrienne gets to decide what books she does or doesn't write, as does everyone else!

But I'm sharing this little story with you to remind you of the power of the brain—particularly the introvert's brain, with its propensity to quietly ponder—when it is seemingly “at rest” and undistracted.

Our brains are never really resting, of course. In fact, during those comparatively rare times when they aren't bogged down by texts and emails and ringing phones and televisions and podcasts and social media and to-do lists and kids fighting and pets wanting to be walked and all the rest, they can go into what Washington University brain researcher Marcus Raichle calls the *default mode*: basically, a state of blissful “unclutteredness” that allows for all sorts of inspiration and integration to take place.

It is essentially the opposite of the laser focus so many of us introverts want (need?) when we are working on an important task that we've already clearly defined.

Perhaps it's no wonder, then, that psychiatrist Srinii Pillay—author of the book *Tinker, Dabble, Doodle, Try*—refers to the same general concept as *unfocus*; and that productivity expert Chris Bailey—author of the book *Hyperfocus*—refers to the idea as *scatterfocus*.

When, unintentionally, you sort of fortuitously slip into the default mode/*unfocus*/*scatterfocus*, amazing thoughts and ideas will almost inevitably crop up—again, especially if that introverted mind of yours is predisposed to such things.

That's why, until recently—when the accompanying pencil made a daring escape down the drain—I had one of those pads of waterproof paper suction-cupped to the shower wall. (Which reminds me: I gotta replace that thing.)



What's really exciting, though, is this: You can (learn to) **intentionally** go into the default mode/*unfocus*/*scatterfocus*.

Or to perhaps put it a little more precisely: You can (learn to) put yourself into circumstances and environments where the default mode/*unfocus*/*scatterfocus* is far more likely to occur “out of the blue.”

Let your shower (or bath), for example, simply be your shower/bath. Don't, as I often do, bring your phone in there so that you can listen to music and sing, at least not all the time.

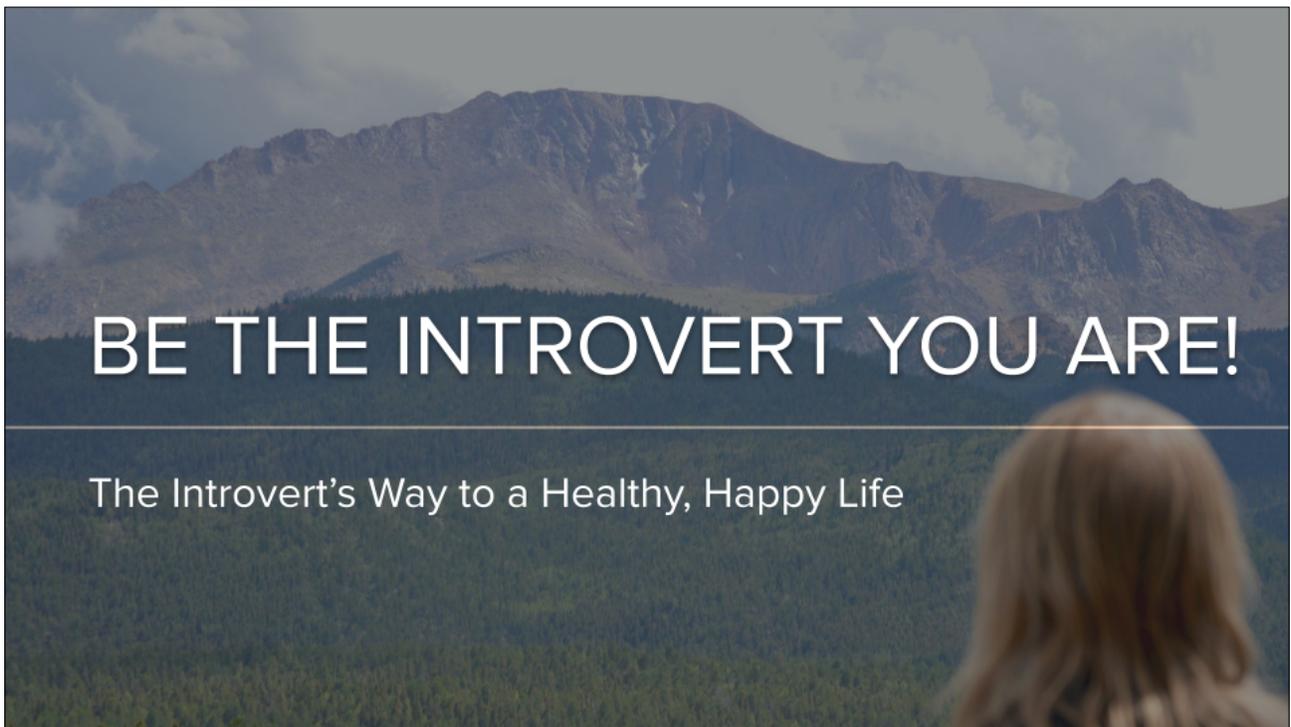
Go for a walk, ideally out in nature, and leave your cell phone in the car or back at home. Throw a small notebook into your pocket, along with a pen, just in case some insights show up that you'd like to capture.

Sit—just sit—quietly. (Yes, it can be shockingly difficult!) Do nothing. Don't read, don't text, don't talk to anyone else. Just ... wait.

Soon enough, the ideas will start to flow. And you can run with them.

Or farm them out to your unsuspecting wife.

Coming in September ...



My new online course that will free you to **BE** you!

PRACTICAL RESEARCH

Personality-Coping Link Isn't as Clearcut as We May Think

As a culture, we need to be careful about what we (think we) “know” with respect to people’s introversion/extraversion and their response to adversity, suggests a new study published in the journal *PLOS ONE*.

According to lead author David Rettew, an associate professor of psychiatry and pediatrics at the University of Vermont, the study ended up becoming the research equivalent of trying to make lemons out of lemonade.

It began in January 2020, when student volunteers completed a personality assessment and then agreed to give (via a phone app) daily ratings of their mood, stress levels, and

engagement in health-promoting activities like exercise and meditation.

“The original idea,” Rettew notes in a *Psychology Today* blog post, “was to look at the mental health and levels of engagement in wellness activities ... across an entire semester.”

But at mid-semester, the pandemic took hold—and the student participants were swiftly sent home.

Most of them, however, continued responding to the study’s questions each day until the semester ended in May, giving Rettew and his colleagues an unexpected opportunity to “track [the students] during COVID, compare these ratings to prior to the pandemic, and see how personality traits might be linked.”

One intriguing finding: More-extraverted students showed a drop in mood during the COVID period,

while more-introverted students reported a slight rise.

“Traits like introversion are not generally considered a benefit when it comes to resilience, but here it seemed to help with coping with some of the peculiar characteristics of the COVID pandemic,” Rettew writes in the *Psychology Today* post.

“These data help remind us that traits are not inherently good or bad, and that certain less-heralded qualities can prove themselves very useful in some tough situations.”

Sources: “Personality Trait Predictors of Adjustment During the COVID Pandemic Among College Students,” *PLOS ONE* (March 17, 2021—online); “Did Introverts Have an Advantage During COVID?” *Psychology Today* website, March 23, 2021.

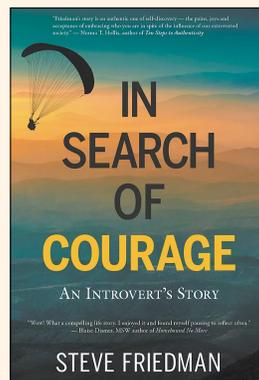
REFLECTIVE READS

In Search of Courage Shows the Perils of Fighting Yourself

Steve Friedman calls his poignant memoir *In Search of Courage: An Introvert’s Story*. But he might just as well have titled it *In Search of Acceptance*—not acceptance by others but, rather, acceptance of himself as an introvert in an extraverted world, especially in the context of work.

After his parents (his father in particular) advise against him majoring in journalism in college, Friedman chooses a more “marketable” (his dad’s term) degree in finance.

A few years later, nearing his graduation, Friedman applies for



and ends up landing a supply analyst job with Shell Oil.

He then spends the next few decades working for Shell, advancing to outward-facing roles that are exciting in their own way—not to mention lucrative—but that too of-

ten go against his introverted personality, often to his detriment.

To be clear: Friedman had a generally successful career with Shell before retiring in 2018. But he paid a price for the mismatch between who he is and what his various jobs at Shell entailed. He sometimes drank too much; he repeatedly put on weight, lost it, and put it back on; and he lived every day with the consequences, as did his family.

Today, he writes, “I’m proud to be an introvert.” But he also ponders “what life would have been like if I had been more confident, more outgoing, more vibrant and engaging, and, well, more extroverted.”

Continued from page 1

They'll Come to You

When I attended that next MCDA conference, my nametag—like those of everyone else on the conference planning committee—had a colorful little sticker on it indicating that I was a member of the committee.

So what, you ask?

The sticker signified that I had a “job” with the conference. And that clear signal in turn made people **come up to me**—to say thanks, to ask where the restrooms were, to figure out where the room was for a session they wanted to attend, and on and on.

Just like that, then, people were approaching me to say hello, giving me and them a chance to introduce ourselves to each other organically instead of artificially. And, from my perspective at least, opening the door to more-extensive and more-fruitful discussions later.

All because I had a job—a role

that others in attendance could easily identify and then cite as a simple reason to approach me.

It worked—and still works—like a charm. And you, too, can use the strategy, in all kinds of everyday social circumstances.

A Versatile Tactic

Sometimes, the person(s) hosting a social event will simply offer you one of these jobs; if so, take it!

It's more likely, though, that you'll have to offer yourself up for such a job—or simply take it on voluntarily if and when the opportunity presents itself.

A few examples:

Your parents' 50th anniversary party. Offer to be the person who buys and then gets attendees to sign a guestbook commemorating the occasion. Suddenly you have a reason to approach people and talk to them, and they you.

The book fair at your kid's school. Volunteer to help oversee sales transactions at the cash

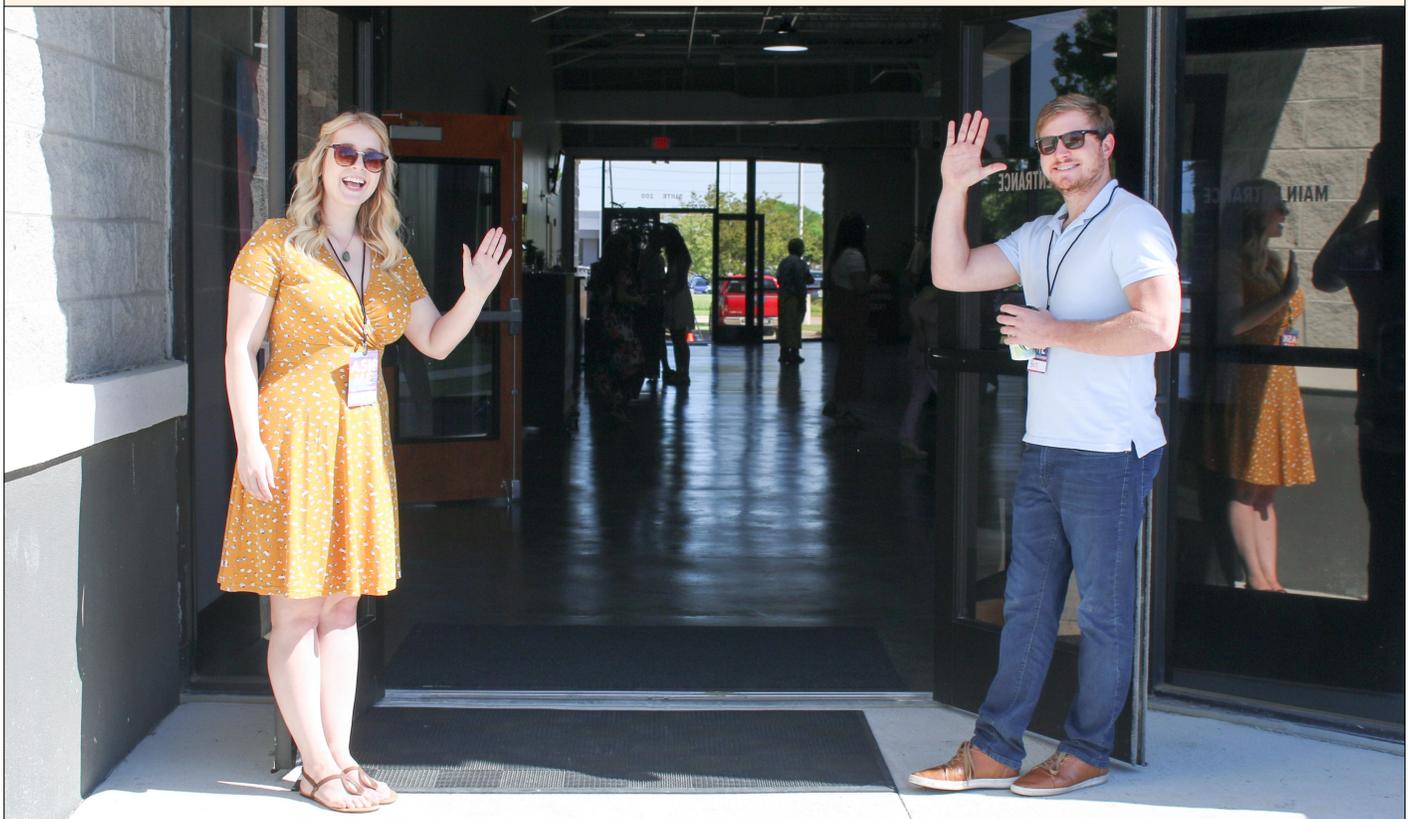
register, or join the small group of parents who set the whole thing up and take it down.

Services at your religious institution. Be a greeter—one of the people who makes **others** feel welcome at the gathering and helps them get settled into their seats.

The “command performance” holiday party for work. If/when one of your colleagues asks you to help plan the thing, say yes—but with a semi-behind-the-scenes role in mind. For instance: You could conduct an informal survey (via email or simply by talking to people in person) to get a sense of what food and drink offerings attendees would like to see.

The “job” you get—or create—at a social gathering doesn't have to be a big one. It just needs to be viewed by others as the job/role it is, so that it naturally compels people to seek you out.

Because then they will—and you can use your energy to savor interactions instead of trying to spark them.





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INTROVERT INSPIRATIONS

“It’s important to remember that introverts are not extraverts who are missing a few good traits. They’re different, and that’s all right.”

~ Will Zolpe

“Loneliness is a lack of something; solitude is where we meet ourselves, devoid of the layers and dynamics that we naturally adopt in others’ company. ... Solitude is your patient friend, waiting to offer you solace.”

~ Cathy Hogan

“Introverts, here’s the secret: Rebel a little and be as stubbornly yourself as extraverts are. ... Be the introvert you are, and be mighty proud of it!”

~ Sarah Salmon

“Respect who you are. You are an introvert. Own it, and respect it before anything else.”

~ Frank Hamilton