



# i introvert insights

## Harness the Power of *Friction* to Get Where You Want to Go

By Peter Vogt

Ice skating fills me with a child-like sense of awe, even today as I approach age 55.

Maybe it's because I grew up in Minnesota, on a lake that froze starting in December. Maybe it's because my mom was Canadian, and she—like all other Canadians—was born wearing a tiny pair of skates. Maybe it's because I simply enjoy the wonder of being outside in nature.

I suppose all of these factors and others are at work. But what I really love—what's magical about ice skating—involves *friction*.

Make that lack of friction.

When you're skating, you're able to move faster and more smoothly than you ever thought possible from so little effort.

Yes, there's the falling, especially in the beginning. But once you get the hang of it, you see that skating is one of the most efficient modes of transport around, largely because you're on a relatively frictionless surface that allows you to get moving and stay moving with relative ease.

Even if you've never ice skated before, you know what skating's friction-free experience looks like and feels like. If you've ever played air hockey, for example, you've seen how you can move the little plastic puck several feet with a mere nudge. If you've ever gone skiing, you know how quickly you go down the snowy slope, even on the bunny hill. If you've ever gone roller skating or inline skating ... same story.

Wendy Wood, a psychology and business professor at the University of Southern California, has built an entire self-help approach around the friction concept. She illustrates it in her fascinating book *Good Habits, Bad Habits: The Science of Making Positive Changes That Stick*.

If you're an introvert like me who struggles sometimes with the overthinking and distractions that can get in the way of you completing a challenging task, or even starting it in the first place, Wood's application of friction might just become your new best friend.

It sure has for me.

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# TIPS, TRICKS, AND TOOLS

## DECISION MAKING

### Use the “Snap Judgment Test” to Counteract Overthinking

As an introvert, you likely pride yourself—rightfully so—on your willingness and ability to think carefully before acting.

But sometimes you’ve no doubt slipped from **carefully** thinking into **overthinking**. (We all have!) And that can be problematic, especially when you’re trying to make a critical decision about something that’s going on in your life and you find yourself just plain stuck.

What to do?

Executive coach Melody Wilding suggests trying what she calls the Snap Judgment Test.

“On a piece of paper, write a question, such as ‘will taking the promotion make me happy?’” Wilding writes in her recent *Harvard Business Review* website article entitled “How to Stop Overthinking and Start Trusting Your Gut.”

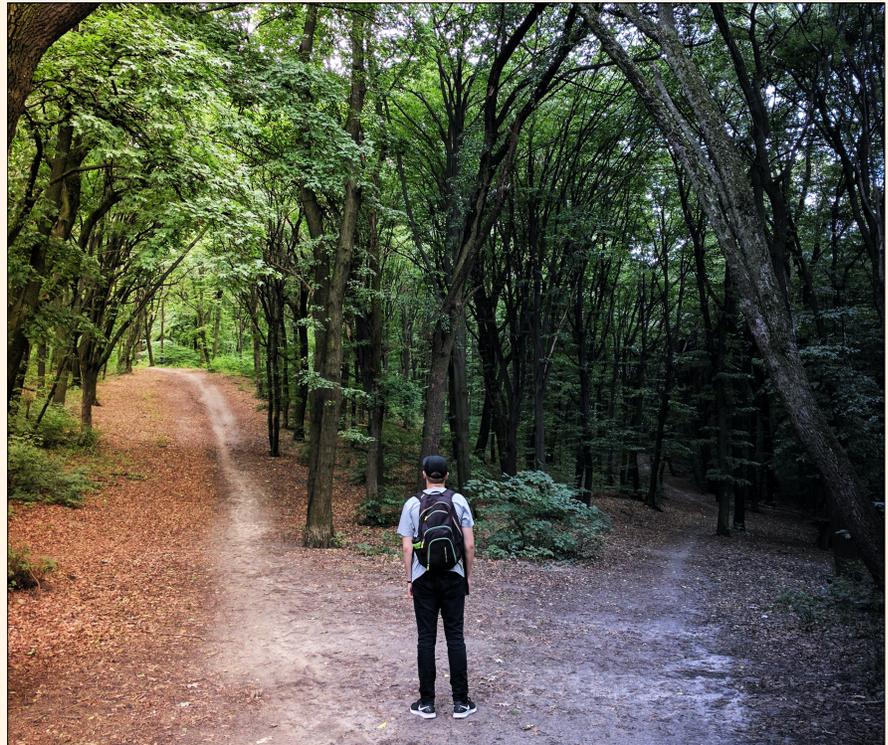
List “yes” or “no” below the question, Wilding says, and leave a pen nearby. Then, after a few hours

have passed, come back to the paper and immediately circle your answer.

“It might not be an answer you like,” Wilding acknowledges, “especially if the question is a big one. But there’s a good chance that you forced yourself to respond honestly.”

Wilding—author of the book

*Trust Yourself: Stop Overthinking and Channel Your Emotions for Success at Work*—says the Snap Judgment Test relies on the process of rapid cognition, or *thin-slicing*, which allows your brain to make decisions without overthinking and helps “strengthen your trust in your gut.”



## RELATIONSHIPS

### To Connect with Neighbors, Try a Little Give or a Little Take

On the one hand, you’ve been wanting to get to know that neighbor of yours. But on the other, you’re hesitant—because it means not only stepping out of your comfort zone, but also taking the risk that you’ll be turned away ... or **not** turned away!

Twyla Franz, an introvert herself, gets it. So she offers some simple

suggestions in her recent *Uncommon Normal* website article entitled “7 Tips for Introverts on Growing Friendships with Neighbors.”

Two of the easiest to implement: give something—specifically, food; and ask for something.

“Keep your eyes and ears open for when a neighbor might be coming home with a new baby, post-surgery, or without a loved one,” Franz says.

“You don’t have to say much, and you don’t even have to home-cook a meal. Just dropping by with some food will be a tremendous blessing ... and potentially open a door to new friendships.”

The same goes for asking your neighbor for something, Franz says.

“It’s amazing how something as small as asking a neighbor to borrow a spice or an egg can take a friendship to a whole new level.”

## As You Head Back to In-Person Work, Protect Your Lunch Break

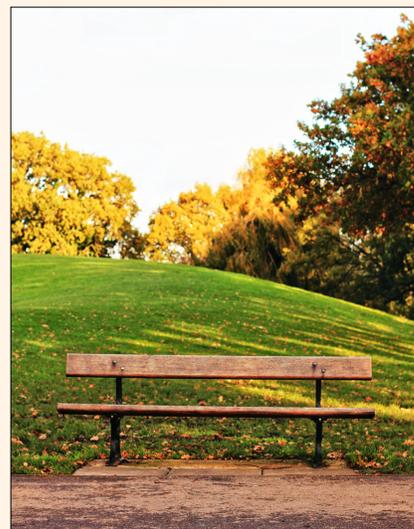
If you're one of the many people who are, or soon will be, heading back to the in-person office environment after a year or two of working remotely, Maurie Backman has a quick heads-up for you: Be prepared to (re)claim your lunch break.

No, it's not that you're not going to **get** a lunch break. It's that you need to intentionally protect it, at least sometimes, to give yourself a chance to replenish your energy, especially when you've likely gotten used to being able to do so during the pandemic.

"When you work in an office, there's more pressure to join colleagues for a walk to the sandwich shop or gather around the break room table. But it's OK to spend that time alone and use it to recharge your batteries," Backman writes in her recent *Motley Fool* website article entitled "How to Survive a Return to In-Person Work as an Introvert."

That doesn't mean having lunch at your desk, though, Backman is quick to caution.

"Instead," she writes, "find a spot you can escape to, whether it's a local park, a cafe in town that your colleagues haven't yet discovered, or



even the comfort of your own car parked around the corner from your office building."

## COMMUNICATION TIPS

### Prepare a Few Small-Talk Questions Ahead of Time

You probably don't exactly love small talk, whether it's at work or elsewhere. But it's a part of life as a human being. And let's admit it: Sometimes it's even enjoyable.

Often, though, it isn't, especially when you're caught off guard ... or you're in the middle of something ... or you have an urgent task that you need to (finally) get started on ... or all of the above.

A recent article on the website [AllAboutIntroverts.com](http://AllAboutIntroverts.com) offers a potential solution to the small-talk dilemma, one that will likely resonate with the introverted part of you that thrives on preparation.

To wit: Think—ahead of time—of a few questions you can ask of people in small-talk situations.

Take work, for example. You know the chit-chat is coming, particularly first thing in the morning after a weekend or a holiday break.

What questions might you ask of your conversation partner? Try these, the [AllAboutIntroverts.com](http://AllAboutIntroverts.com) article suggests:

*How was your weekend?*

*What projects have you been working on?*

*Do you have any special plans coming up?*

"These questions not only give you something to ask, but help your coworkers see you as someone who is interested in their lives," the article notes. "You'll break the ice and avoid the usual small talk anxiety."



# IT'S AN INTROVERT'S LIFE

## Turns Out That You Really Do Function Better When You Sleep

By Peter Vogt

Sometimes, you—well, I—need to get punched in the mouth repeatedly before you (er, I) give something the respect it deserves.

As I turn 55, I am coming to this sort of begrudging peace accord with sleep.

I have spent much of my adult life believing I could function fairly well on fairly little and/or fairly poor sleep. And to be clear, the research backs me up on this front. Kind of.

Specifically, much of the research out there suggests that, compared to our extraverted counterparts, we introverts function much better under conditions where we have been sleep deprived.

Ha!

What the research does not say, however, is that we introverts—irrespective of how we compare to anyone else—function **well** under conditions where we have been sleep deprived.

Turns out we—um, I—don't.

I don't really need a full-fledged, published study to tell me this. All I have to do is look at the last 60 or so hours of my own life. Call it a focus group of one.

I swear that 1) I am not making any of the following up, and 2) I don't use hard drugs.

Two nights ago, I slept terribly, finally giving up completely at 3:30 in the morning after an epic dream in which I was calling myself “SpongePete SquarePants” and leaping from the balcony to the main

floor of an arena, shouting “let's all sing!” and trying to get people to join me in belting out the live version of “I Want You to Want Me” from the classic 1978 album “Cheap Trick at Budokan.”

Seriously, no hard drugs.

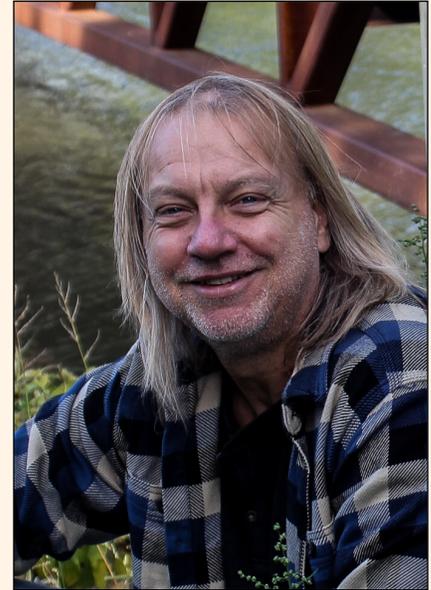
Anyway, my writing yesterday ... sucked. My No. 1 go-to tool as the introvert I am—my ability to think deeply and articulate those thoughts through my fingertips via the computer keyboard—well, with props to another seventies band, Aerosmith: It got up and went. And it didn't come back.

Until today, thanks to the near-opposite sleeping experience I had last night. No SpongePete. No leaping. No Budokan. I awoke this morning feeling like a completely different person, physically, psychologically, and emotionally.

I'm tempted to credit the Hershey's Kisses I had last night—and not the night before!—but I know in my heart of hearts that the obvious answer, a good night's sleep, is the correct answer in this case.

Still, it's hard to part completely with an old—well, if not an old friend, then at least an old, trusty companion.

I rely, after all, on the occasional late night—when everyone else is in bed—to get the quiet alone time I so desperately want and need as an introvert. My lovely wife, Adrienne, an introvert herself, does the same thing when she wakes up very early each weekday, long before the rest of us, to get the quiet alone time **she** so



desperately wants and needs before gearing up to teach her kindergarteners and first-graders for eight hours.

You probably have your own ways of borrowing from your sleep time to give yourself the time you need in other introverted areas of your life, particularly the crucial area of solitude.

Am I suggesting that you, and I, give this time up, or give it back?

No.

But I am suggesting that you, and I, use the borrowing-from-sleep-time strategy sparingly, perhaps more sparingly than we (I) have cared to acknowledge in the past.

Because if you once again look at the research in the broad area of personality and sleep, you'll find something else to be true: While we introverts tend to function better than extraverts do on compromised sleep, we are also more likely than extraverts to have compromised sleep in the first place.

So take it from me—SpongePete SquarePants.

Take your sleep seriously.

I'll be doing the same.

Coming soon ...

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



You **deserve** to be who you are.

You **need** to be who you are.

You **can** be who you are.

And with the right knowledge, the right practical tools, and the right mindset ...

**You Will!**

# PRACTICAL RESEARCH

## You Don't Have to Express Your Gratitude Face to Face

If you're grateful to someone, conventional wisdom in the field of positive psychology suggests that it is good for you (and for the other person) to **communicate** your gratitude to that someone.

But does it matter **how** you do so? Specifically, does it matter whether you express your gratitude in person, face to face—a potentially stressful energy drain for you as an introvert—vs. through a text or a call?

No, not really, according to a recent article in *The Journal of Positive Psychology*.

The article summarizes three studies conducted with participants from the United States and Taiwan.

The first, an imagined-scenario study, found that participants expected to experience both more positive and more negative emotion in face-to-face expressions of gratitude.

The second, using a retrospective approach, asked the participants to recall how they felt after a recent instance of thanking someone, either in person or via text. Participants' positive emotions were essentially the same in both conditions.

Finally, the third study asked the participants to thank three people over the span of two weeks. Some of the participants were told to do so face to face, some via a video call, and the rest via text.

"All three gratitude conditions boosted well-being compared to a neutral control condition, but differed little from each other in their

effects," write researchers Kennon Sheldon of the University of Missouri-Columbia and Sen-chi Yu of Taiwan's National Taichung University of Education.

"[W]e feel fairly confident in one conclusion," Sheldon and Sen-chi write: "Texting one's thanks may be just as rewarding, for both parties, as thanking face to face.

"It may also be less emotionally risky, in addition to being less physically risky and more convenient. Thus, as a practice, it may be well worth developing."

**Source:** "Methods of Gratitude Expression and Their Effects Upon Well-Being: Texting May Be Just as Rewarding as and Less Risky Than Face-to-Face," *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, April 19, 2021 (online publication).

# REFLECTIVE READS

## Self-Care for Introverts Offers Strategies for the Real World

Barrie Davenport lives in the real world, with the rest of us. It shows in her solidly down-to-earth book *Self-Care for Introverts*.

Davenport, a former public relations professional who is now a coach and instructor, offers a highly practical primer on taking care of yourself as an introvert in an extraverted environment.

Yes, "understanding how you operate in the world and validating your own worthiness as an introvert is extremely valuable for your self-esteem, relationships, and personal

motivation," says Davenport, an introvert herself. "But that awareness doesn't change the fact that you are still operating in a culture that favors the extravert ideal."

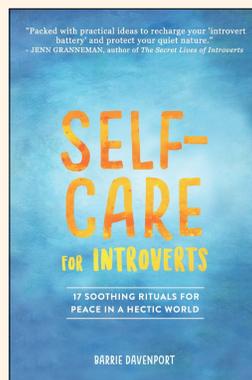
That's why developing your own self-care strategies—ones that work

for you, as an introvert—is so critical, Davenport stresses.

She then describes the many self-care possibilities available to you, in the broad areas of physical self-care and mental and emotional self-care. And she does so with the good sense and grace to acknowledge that the work isn't always easy.

"It takes time to implement these big changes," she writes, "but doing so can mean the difference between feeling trapped in an overwhelming, depleting situation or living more in alignment with who you are.

"The time it takes is nothing compared to the positive effects the change will have on your life."



Continued from page 1

## Smoothen Your Path

Here's how Wood's concept works, in a huge nutshell: If you have some big project you want to do, you'll be far more likely to get started on it—and ultimately finish it—if you intentionally look for ways to reduce the friction that is already lurking between you and both the starting line and the finish line.

Let me give you an example. Each month, when I begin to write this very newsletter, I am staring at roughly six and a half blank pages of space that I need to fill. I have been writing for **decades** now, and still—still—the first thought that pops into my head each month is: “What if the words don't show up this time?”

I have at least learned by now that I can ignore this voice, and I do. But I still have to write the newsletter. And so I look for, and implement, every way I can think of to reduce the friction between me and, well, both the starting line and the finish line.

I employ three key strategies:

I clean my office, particularly my desk, so that there is no sense of clutter whatsoever.

I pick one specific section of the newsletter to work on first—the quotes on page 8—because it's quick and easy (I've already done all the thinking in locating the quotes in the first place), and thus it consistently gets me launched and propels me on.

I continue writing by picking one item to work on at a time, trusting in the fact that this sequence will eventually lead to my completion of the newsletter.

As you can see ... it works. It transforms whatever you're doing into a sort of routine—or habit, as Wood refers to it—that is an especially effective weapon against the overthinking and procrastination that can too easily sabotage what you're trying to accomplish.

## Use the Other Friction Too

I wasn't aware of it until I read Wood's book, but I also use a sort of

converse version of Wood's friction idea. You can too.

It goes like this: Just as you can proactively **remove** friction to smooth the path toward what you **want** to do, you can intentionally **create** friction to stand between you and what you **don't** want to do.

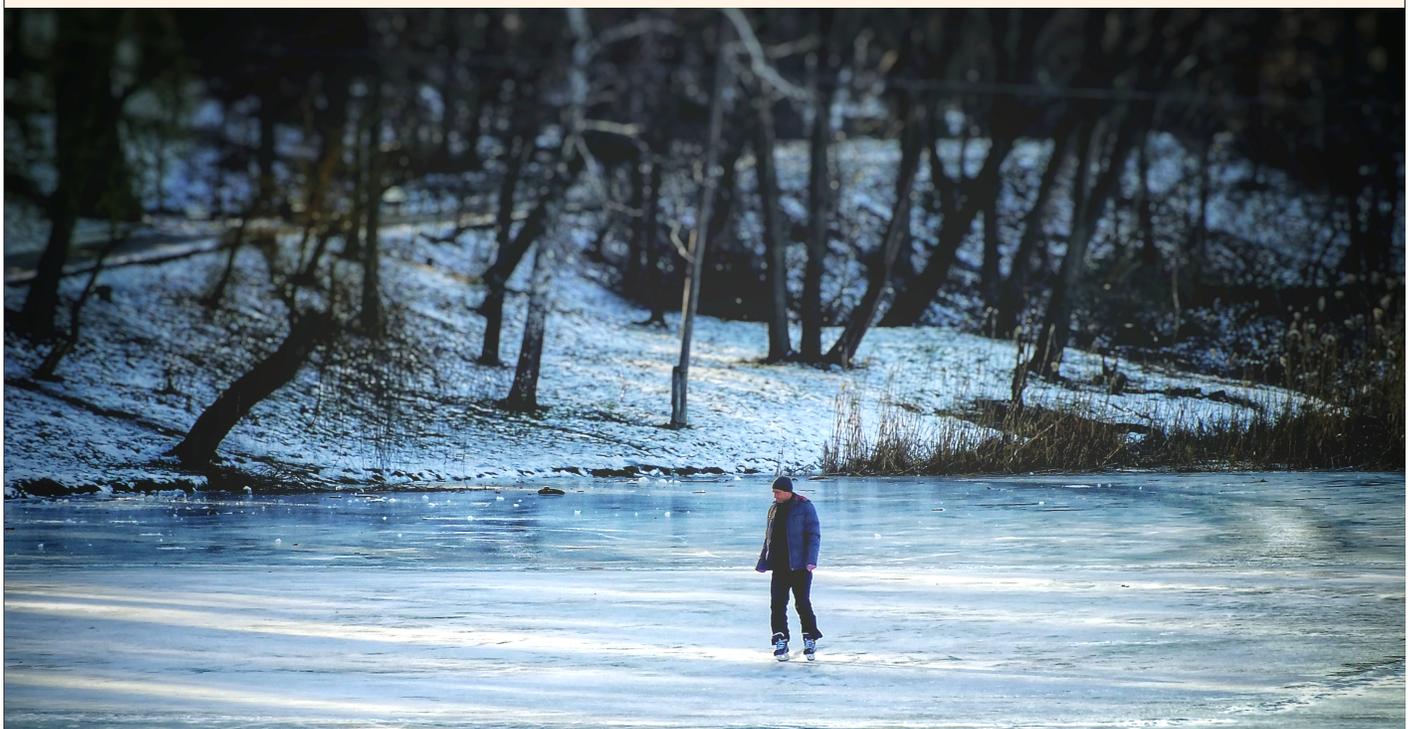
How does this concept help me write this newsletter? In two ways:

I close every program but the one I'm using—and turn off my connection to the Internet—before I start writing on my computer, so that there is no temptation to get distracted from what I'm doing.

I put my cell phone in another room so that it is about 90 feet (I measured) from my hand—and thus my attention.

Wood's approach isn't foolproof. And, just like skating, there's the falling, especially in the beginning.

But once you get the hang of it, you'll see that harnessing the power of friction gives you access to one of the most efficient modes of transport around.





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## INTROVERT INSPIRATIONS

“We get so caught up in what we should do that we lose sight of why we would do some things at all. There’s what you should do—or what you think that others think you should do—and then there’s what works best for you.”

~ Mariella Franker

“Who you are as an individual is your strength. Popular culture talks a lot about helping introverts get better in front of people and less time helping extraverts hush up. I’d say, own your natural strengths and focus on that.”

~ Elizabeth Roberts

“I encourage my introvert brothers and sisters to celebrate their gifts of listening, watching, and gathering. Become known for ‘pausing’ and then contributing.”

~ Kim Gray

“[Y]ou have the choice of how you react to being an introvert. Give yourself permission to be who you really are.”

~ Merinda Smith