

# i introvert insights

## Buy Yourself Time So That You Can Contribute Your Best Ideas

By Peter Vogt

Sophia Dembling is “terrible” at games that demand speed.

“My attempts at computer games that involve shooting fast-moving objects turn into frenzied and ineffectual smashing of computer keys,” she writes in her informative book *The Introvert’s Way: Living a Quiet Life in a Noisy World*.

She fares no better in games where players have to think of a certain number of words in a specified timeframe.

“I come up with words,” Dembling says, “but other people come up with more. I find this mildly embarrassing, what with my being a writer and all.”

Like many introverts, Dembling always figured she was just a slower thinker compared to most extraverts. But years ago, when she ran her theory past personality researcher Robert Stelmack, he set her straight.

Introverts are not necessarily slower thinkers than extraverts, Stelmack told her. But they are slower than extraverts at **acting** on their

thoughts, particularly when it comes to translating thoughts to speech in the immediate moment.

When I first read this idea, I remember the proverbial lightbulb going off in my head.

*“That’s why my best answers at job interviews always come **afterwards**, in the elevator as I’m leaving the building!”* I thought to myself.

We introverts need our thinking time—before, during, and after our experiences. We need to think before an experience to prepare for it, and after an experience to process it.

And during an experience? It’s almost always to buy ourselves time to verbally respond somehow.

That’s damn difficult.

Fortunately, we have some helpful strategies we can turn to. Here are four that I’ve developed—or borrowed!—over the years.

### “Can I Take a Second?”

It had never occurred to me, and no one had ever told me, that if I was in a job interview, for example, I could respond in the moment to a

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# TIPS, TRICKS, AND TOOLS

## RELATIONSHIPS

### Deepen Your In-Person Get-Togethers by Keeping in Touch

If you'd like to have deeper, more meaningful talks with friends or family members when you get together with them in person, be sure you do a good job of staying in touch with them during the in-between times, advises psychologist Laurie Helgoe, author of the book *Introvert Power: Why Your Inner Life Is Your Hidden Strength*.

Specifically, use “low-lift” forms of communication, like texting or emailing, to touch base regularly with the people you get together with from time to time, Helgoe says in a recent *Well+Good* website article (by Erica Sloan) entitled “Socializing Is Connected to Longevity—Here’s How Introverts Can Still Reap the Benefits.”

The idea, Helgoe says, is to prevent your comparatively rare in-person get-togethers from turning into mere “life dumps”—semi-dissatisfying sessions where you



and your counterpart simply take turns filling each other in on what's been going on in your lives.

Once the two of you fall into that type of trap, Helgoe says, you won't have enough time—or energy—left to get into the intimate discussions you (and perhaps your counterpart as well) crave.

Helgoe offers a related piece of advice too: When you schedule in-person get-togethers with your

closest friends or family members, set aside enough time to make the sessions be what you, and your counterpart, want them to be.

“That could mean regular 30-minute coffees or more sporadic three-hour hangouts,” Sloan summarizes in the *Well+Good* article.

“But either way, it's important to hit a critical mass of time, so to speak, to ensure you both have the space to feel truly seen and heard.”

## COMMUNICATION SKILLS

### Let the Supportive Listeners Carry You in Presentations

Whenever you're giving a public presentation of some sort—be it at work or in another setting—you're bound to spot a few people in the audience who are visibly bored, or angry to be present, or worse.

“Some make absolutely no attempt to disguise their cynicism or dislike about what you are saying.

Such is human nature. We are never going to please everyone,” says Jamie Thom, an English teacher in Scotland and author of the book *A Quiet Education: Challenging the Extrovert Ideal in Our Schools*.

Public speaking is draining to begin with, even when you enjoy it. So what can you do to combat the sour faces in your audience?

Steer your attention away from them, Thom advises, and toward the

people who clearly are ready to hear what you have to say.

“[A] large number are wonderful, and their facial expressions are willing us on. They smile, they nod, they encourage,” Thom writes in his recent blog post entitled “An Introvert's Guide to Public Speaking.”

“While you talk, keep coming back to them. They are the fuel we need to give us confidence and persevere.”



## You Don't Have to Go to Large Networking Events

You can tap into all kinds of strategies to help yourself handle—even do well at—large networking events, but it's easy to forget your most obvious option:

Don't go at all.

Yes, that's a viable choice, says writer Matthew Sweeney, in his *ZDNet* website article entitled "How to Network as an Introvert."

"Remember that you don't need to force yourself to attend optional large-scale events to network successfully," Sweeney writes.

"Forcing yourself to attend these

events can take up time you could spend networking in more comfortable settings."

Writer and content strategist Madeleine Burry agrees.

"For many, it's the in-person quality of networking events that can be particularly challenging," Burry says in her *The Balance Careers* website article entitled "8 Career Networking Tips for Introverts."

"The idea of having to go up to strangers can be enough to make hands sweat and stomachs roll."

So network your own way, Burry suggests, especially since we now live in "a digital age."

"Take your networking to the

web: Establish an active Twitter presence and interact with people in your field," Burry says.

"Build up your LinkedIn profile and activity. Virtual networking is a terrific way to grow your networking without going to an event."

And when you do want—or need—to get together with people in person? Skip the big events and instead play to your one-on-one communication strengths and preferences, Burry says.

"Suggest coffee dates and other one-on-one interactions," she writes, "and ask friends and colleagues to set you up on chats with people outside of your immediate network."

## JOB INTERVIEWS

## Take the Mystery Out of Getting to Your Interview Site

You'll face a lot of uncertainty during any job interview, but one thing's for sure: If you're not on time for your appointment, you're all but done for.

You just **can't** be late.

Interviews are draining enough to begin with, so why not take the being-late factor out of the equation by mapping out your route to the interview site well ahead of time, suggests writer Maddie Lloyd, in her *Zippia* website article entitled "7 Job Interview Tips for Introverts."

"A few days before your interview, make sure you know exactly where the company's located and the route you're going to take to get there," Lloyd says.

"Keep traffic flow in mind so you can give yourself plenty of time to show up with 15 minutes to spare."

If you want to give yourself even more assurance that you'll be able to

get to your interview on time, you can take Lloyd's advice a step further and do what I myself have done many times (for both job interviews and other important appointments): Practice—literally—getting to the meeting site, perhaps a day or two ahead of time.

If you'll be traveling by car, for example, get in your car and drive to the interview site. How long does it

take? How much traffic do you have to contend with? Where can you park upon arrival? Where will you enter the building?

You can do the same thing if you'll be taking public transit. Will you have to switch buses? Which train station is nearest to the interview site?

Figure it all out ahead of time and you'll be **on** time, ready to succeed.



# IT'S AN INTROVERT'S LIFE

## Jim and Stan Should Have Used One-on-One Connecting Tactics

By Peter Vogt

Who among us hasn't been asked, out of the blue on a quiet Tuesday morning, to drive 12 miles into the nearby countryside to round up a friend's escaped alpacas, armed only with a bucket of treat pellets and a four-foot ski pole?

OK, I guess that is a bit on the atypical side. But it's where I indeed found myself the other day, after my wife's friend Jackie—out of town nearly 200 miles away—called to see if maybe ... well, could I go coax her trio of alpacas out of her neighbor's field and get them back home where they belong?

I jumped at the opportunity. It would be my chance to be Jim (or Stan, take your pick) from the old "Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom" TV show.

You'll remember poor Jim and Stan: Every Sunday night they had to do all the dirty work—like swimming into the raging river to save the drowning antelope, or wrestling the boa constrictor into submission with their bare hands—while show host Marlin Perkins flew safely above them in the comfort of the helicopter, "scanning topographical maps of the surrounding area."

Even Jim and Stan didn't deal with dangerous alpacas, nor did they ever face the unforgiving plains of rural Moorhead, Minnesota.

So they were on my mind when I arrived at Jackie's place and found ... nothing. Nothing but a forced-open gate to the alpacas' pen, that is.

I went into the barn and grabbed the bucket of treat pellets and the ski pole, just as Jackie had advised, and started walking north on the dirt road in front of the house.

I crossed the road to take a look in that neighbor's yard. Nothing. I walked another block or so in the same direction, figuring the nearby church might bring divine intervention. Still nothing.

Then I turned around—and saw movement in front of a growing cloud of dust, several hundred feet south down the road.

*"It's Jim! And Stan! Hell, maybe even Marlin, too!"* I thought to myself. *"They're on horses, rounding up the alpacas, just like John Wayne would have done! It's the cavalry!"*

Not exactly.

It was the FedEx guy, seeing me flailing away in the distance as I jumped up and down with my bait and my ski pole.

Over the next minute, FedEx Man did an amazingly "Bonanza"-esque job of weaving his van back and forth to slowly drive the runaway alpacas to within 15 feet of me.

"I did my best," he told me through his window as he drove off.

"They're not mine," I replied—for some reason.

We were two driveways, and about a hundred yards as the crow flies, away from the alpacas' pen now. Time to use one of my best introvert skills: my ability to connect with people—and thus, theoretically, alpacas—one on one.



"It's time to go home now," I said in a sing-songy voice to the white one, the clear leader of the posse.

"Bite me," he/she/it replied. "We don't need no stinking pen."

Hmm ...

"Maybe **this** will change your mind," I responded. And I shook the bucket of pellets as I started walking backward down the road.

White One and the two others immediately began to follow.

We got to the next driveway. Then, figuring the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, I began cutting through the yard of Jackie's nextdoor neighbor.

The alpacas froze.

"Let's go!" I said to White One.

"We can't cut through the neighbor's yard," he/she/it replied. "That would be against the rules."

So I went back out to the road, got the three prodigals to continue to **Jackie's** yard, and finally led them into the middle of their pen.

Whereupon I trotted away and closed the gate.

And child-proofed it with a tie-down strap.

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# PRACTICAL RESEARCH

## Extraverts Are Seen As Poorer Listeners Than Introverts

If, as an introvert, you frequently experience your conversations with extraverts as being one-sided, you're not alone, suggests a recent article in the journal *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

The article describes six studies, all of which shared one key finding: that extraverts are seen as poorer listeners than introverts.

Whether extraverts actually are poorer listeners than introverts is a different—and quite complicated—question, researchers Francis Flynn, Hanne Collins, and Julian Zlatev point out.

But in terms of perception, extraverts are viewed as falling far short of being genuinely good listeners,

the studies revealed.

The first study, a preliminary investigation, involved 147 first-year business students who were already meeting each week in groups of six as part of a course on developing leadership skills.

The students were asked to rate the listening skills of everyone else in their group, and to then complete a self-assessment of their own level of extraversion/introversion.

The more-extraverted students in the groups were consistently seen as being the worst listeners, the study found.

The follow-up studies all came to the same conclusion, with the later ones uncovering an additional significant finding: that extraverts are seen to be worse listeners because they are essentially perceived to be

putting on a show during their social encounters with others.

"That is, people link extraversion to poor listening behavior based on their inferences about how extraversion relates to the 'acting' component of self-monitoring," the researchers write.

"To observers, this signal of malleable self-presentation suggests that extraverts are more interested in 'looking the part' than attending to what others have to say."

**Sources:** "Are You Listening to Me? The Negative Link Between Extraversion and Perceived Listening," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, March 18, 2022 (online); "Extraverts Are Considered to Be Poorer Listeners," The British Psychological Society website, April 26, 2022.

# REFLECTIVE READS

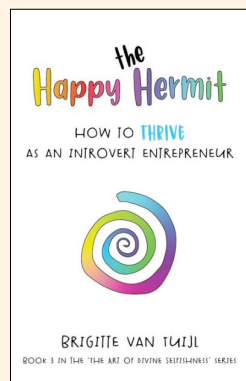
## The Happy Hermit: To Thrive, You Need to Be Who You Are

*The Happy Hermit* is inspiring. It's also scary, in the best possible sense of the word.

As the book's subtitle suggests, *The Happy Hermit* is author Brigitte van Tuijl's way of illustrating how to thrive—authentically—as an introvert entrepreneur.

How **do** you do it? Well, that's where inspiring-and-scary comes in.

van Tuijl is firm in her conviction: If you want to truly thrive, particularly in the context of having your own business, you need to be who you are as an introvert.



**"I find it extremely important to show introverts that they really do not have to change ANYTHING about themselves,"** she emphasizes in the book's introduction.

The challenge, of course, is believing this inspiring concept in your

heart of hearts, particularly in an extraverted culture. It's a mental battle that van Tuijl herself has been waging for the last decade or so.

But as she argues in the book, in memoir-ish style, there really is no other viable option if you want to flourish without losing yourself.

van Tuijl offers tips and troubleshooting strategies throughout the book, and she's unafraid to share her own struggles and doubts, both past and present.

Her bottom line is unwavering.

"The way to be happy and thrive," she says, "is to be *completely* true to yourself and do what you love in ways that you love."

Continued from page 1

tricky question by simply asking: “Could I take a few seconds to think about that?”

But that’s exactly what I, and you, can do.

It’s a tactic that works in similar situations as well, like those on-the-job meetings where someone asks you something and you can almost feel your brain’s gears locking up, as they struggle to generate a response that will actually come out of your mouth.

Think about it: Is anyone really going to fault you for asking for a few seconds to ponder?

### “Please Repeat”

TV game show contestants often use the “can you please repeat the question?” strategy to buy themselves a bit more time to come up with an answer.

You can do the same, either by asking your questioner to literally repeat the question or, more likely, by getting them to clarify exactly what they’re asking about when the question is broad or vague.

Example:

*“When you say ‘future planning,’ are you talking about the coming weeks and months, or the coming years?”*

### “I’ll Have More Later”

You probably know that you’ll eventually have something substantive to say about most anything that comes up in your daily life—the keyword being “eventually.”

So another thing you can do in the moment is offer up any initial thoughts you have, along with a foreshadowing of the more-detailed response you’ll be able to offer later.

Example:

*“I’m sure I’ll have more to say after I think about it, but for now let me just say this ...”*

If you’re in a relatively new environment where people are just starting to get to know you, you can add something like:

*“I’m better able to contribute when I can think things over first, but here’s my initial take ...”*

### “I’ll Get Back to You”

You can also respond in the moment by deciding not to respond in the moment at all—and then communicating that decision to the person you’re dealing with, along with a firm pledge to respond thoughtfully by a specific time.

Example:

*“I’m sorry but I can’t give you an answer at this moment. I’m up against a deadline, and I also need some time to think it all through. I’ll get back to you by tomorrow morning, though. I’ll send you a detailed email and then come talk to you around 9.”*

Our introverted brains “are what they are,” Dembling says. They are not only slower to act on thoughts in the moment, they’re also more apt to dwell on thoughts in order to process them deeply.

“So we need to allow our brains that room, accept it, and respect it,” Dembling stresses. “Let people know when we need to pause for thought. [And] refuse to let anyone force us into hasty decisions.”





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## INTROVERT INSPIRATIONS

"[A]s an introverted leader, you bring your own unique set of skills to the table. You are resourceful, thoughtful, observant, very talented, and a powerhouse in your field (among many other things!). Hone that talent. Use it."

~ Tina Thomas

"Your tendency to work alone doesn't make you anti-social but allows you to concentrate and produce creativity and beauty for the world."

~ Jen Smith

"Prioritizing alone time ... helps ensure that you regularly allow space to reset your energy. [S]tepping outside for a few moments of deep breathing, or excusing yourself from a room for a few minutes, can help you top up your energy throughout the day."

~ Hayley Merrick

"The thing about being an introvert is finding the conditions that work best for you."

~ Meggan Barraza