

Quiet: The Power of introverts in a world that can't stop talking

Whether you're an introvert or an extrovert determines if you like small talk.

Huge lightbulb moment for me right there.

Do you love when Sally gives you the flimsy details of her latest trip to Cancun over a quick cup of coffee?

Or would you rather talk about Stoic philosophy for 2 hours?

The former speaks more to an extrovert, the latter more to an introvert, of course.

But why is that?

It's because of the way we process information differently.

Introverts are what's called "highly sensitive", meaning **they take in the information given to them, for example via stimuli from their environment, a lot more thoroughly** than their extrovert peers.

For example, an introvert can stand in front of a single big picture in a museum for 10 minutes, continuously observing and looking for new details to be found – a horror fantasy for an extrovert.

In a similar manner, introverts don't like small talk. They are engaged by profound conversations about life, values, morals and ethics, because it allows their highly sensitive information processing to thrive.

People often ask me how I can sit there and talk about a single business idea with my roommate for two hours – if you're one of those people, there's your answer.

In Western cultures, extroverts are often presented as the ideal of success.

Competence and confidence are two different things.

Sadly, in Western cultures, we confuse them a lot.

We often perceive whoever's the most confident to be the most competent as well.

That couldn't be further from the truth, since just being a charming speaker and captivating figure does not make one a good leader.

Being more sociable often leads people to think you're also more interesting and willing to cooperate.

But if you're an introvert, sitting quietly in your corner, just listening and taking everything in, nobody will come and talk to you.

More often than not, people will think you're a weirdo.

In our culture, extroversion is often seen as a prerequisite for success, which gives extroverts an unfair advantage.

Even the best schools, like Harvard, try to groom their graduates into extroverts, by forcing them through group work, seminars, presentations and even going out with fellow students at night as part of their program.

Go to Japan, however, and you'll find none of this. Students study quietly, take vigorous notes and speaking without being asked is considered downright rude.

Different countries, different cultures, but in the Western world, the extrovert ideal prevails.

Companies should adapt their workplaces to let introverts make their best contribution.

Due to the extrovert success ideal, most companies are tailored to extroverts.

Think about it: open offices, meetings, group brainstorming sessions, presentations of PowerPoint slides, workshops and of course, lunch at the canteen.

For introverts this means they feel constantly interrupted, overloaded with information and stressed, which makes it hard for them to thrive in such an environment.

But when you think about it, not all great things were achieved by extroverts or even groups of people.

Wikipedia, for example, is a huge collaboration, but mostly of people who each sit at their computer alone at home.

Einstein thought of the theory of relativity all on his own and Harry Potter was written in solitude too.

So if you have a great introverted thinker on your team, don't force them into a box they don't fit into. Give them the option to work alone and let them flourish – as long as you keep an open mind they'll always come to you once they're ready.

Companies should consider this and have more options for introverts to spend time alone vs. participating in group activities and meetings when they feel they have something to share.