**Are Introverts at a Disadvantage in Negotiation?**

**Learning from extroverts—and capitalizing on one’s strengths**

Are extroverts by nature better negotiators than introverts? Or are they at a disadvantage in negotiation? As we’ll see, the answer is far from decided. However, we all have clear opportunities to build on our own strengths and learn from those of others.

**Quiet, loud, and somewhere in between**

Introversion is a personality trait marked by a desire to think through ideas without interruption and a preference for working alone. Though shy people are more likely to be introverts than extroverts, introverts can be highly confident and skilled public speakers, like Obama. But because introverts generally prefer to be well prepared when speaking to others, unexpected displays of emotion can rattle them, as they may not know how to respond, writes Kelly Lynn Anders in an article in the *Oklahoma City University Law Review* on training introverted mediators to use extroverted techniques.

By contrast, extroverts generally formulate ideas and opinions in conversation with others, prefer to work in groups, and have a high tolerance for distraction, according to Anders. They tend to come alive in the presence of others and to respond skillfully to others’ emotions; they may also experience others’ feelings more deeply than introverts do.

There’s a wide spectrum between being socially withdrawn and being the life of the party, yet most of us are aware of leaning toward either introversion or extroversion. For simplicity’s sake, we focus here on the two distinct types rather than on the shades of gray between them.

**What introverts can learn from extroverts**

To date, little research has compared how introverts and extroverts negotiate. But because negotiation is an inherently social task, we might assume that extroverts would perform better than introverts on many key bargaining tasks, such as building rapport, collaborating to create value, and influencing the other party.

Obama’s lack of popularity with his counterparts on Capitol Hill does suggest a clear vulnerability for introverted negotiators: an impatience with small talk and socializing could lead them to skimp on the relationship-building stage that can be so crucial to business negotiations.

Fortunately for introverts, evidence suggests that they need not suffer through long golf outings and elaborate dinners simply for the sake of building a strong negotiating relationship. In one study, pairs of strangers who engaged in a casual five-minute phone chat before participating in a negotiation simulation via e-mail were four times more likely to reach a beneficial agreement than were pairs who didn’t have a chance to chat, Professor Janice Nadler of Northwestern University found in one study. Though chitchat may not be appropriate at the start of every negotiation, introverts would do well to pause and consider whether their counterparts might appreciate some friendly conversation before getting down to business.

Introverts may also be susceptible to keeping important information about their preferences in a negotiation under wraps. They might benefit from role-playing impending negotiations with friends and colleagues, who can tell them when they are being too withholding. Such practice sessions might help shy negotiators, in particular, gain confidence.

Notably, introverts tend to be more effective when interacting one-on-one than in groups, where they can feel inhibited and overwhelmed. (Our cover story in this issue describes the high value that some Silicon Valley CEOs—perhaps contrary to the stereotype of the introverted technology genius— place on establishing rapport with potential business partners.) To ensure that their views are heard, introverts might seek out opportunities to meet individually with members of a larger group. In addition, because introverts sometimes avoid conflict, they could engage in training or coaching to help them handle strong emotions (both their own and others’) and resolve conflict constructively.

**Questioning the extroverted ideal**

In her book Quiet: *The Power of Introverts in a World That Can’t Stop Talking* (Crown, 2012), writer Susan Cain argues that U.S. society promotes a value system based on the “extroverted ideal”—“the omnipresent belief that the ideal self is gregarious, alpha, and comfortable in the spotlight.” By contrast, despite the fact that up to one half of the U.S. population is introverted, we tend to view introversion as “a second-class personality trait, somewhere between a disappointment and a pathology,” writes Cain. As a result, she argues, introverts often feel a sense of inadequacy that can be debilitating at the negotiating table.

**Make the most of your personal style**

In her book *Quiet*, writer Susan Cain explains how she came to view her introversion as a strength rather than a liability in negotiation.

Early in her career as a Wall Street lawyer, Cain unexpectedly had to take over negotiations on behalf of a client who was on the verge of defaulting on a bank loan. Cain’s job was to try to help her client renegotiate better loan terms from a syndicate of bankers and their general counsel.

Facing the “nine disgruntled investment bankers” across the table, self-described “quiet and daydreamy” Cain was plagued with doubt. Rather than succumbing to her nerves, though, she reminded herself of the advantages that she brought to the table as an introvert. First, her phobia of public speaking probably meant that she had prepared better than everyone else present. Second, her mild-mannered reputation could allow her to negotiate forcefully while still being perceived as reasonable.

In the face of tough demands from the opposing counsel, Cain did what came naturally: She began asking lots of questions, such as “What are your numbers based on?” and “What if we structured the loan this way, do you think it might work?”

As her queries continued, the mood in the room shifted. The bankers began to abandon their hardball tactics. Eventually, the two sides engaged in an open conversation focused on solving their shared problem.

Not only did they reach a mutually beneficial deal, but the bankers’ lead lawyer called Cain the next day to offer her a job, saying she had never seen anyone act “so nice and so tough” simultaneously.

The lesson? Rather than viewing your personal style as a liability, actively strive to capitalize on your strengths in negotiation.

Cain, a former negotiation consultant and practicing lawyer, encourages introverts to focus on the strengths they bring to the bargaining table rather than dwelling on potential limitations. (To learn how she did this herself, see the sidebar above.) For example, an inclination toward deliberation could help negotiators overcome common cognitive biases and avoid impulsive decisions. Moreover, negotiators who sit back and listen could give their counterparts the space they need to express themselves fully.

If there were any doubt, recent research supports the notion that introverts can be highly effective leaders. Introverted leaders are more open than extroverted leaders to suggestions from proactive employees, professors Adam Grant (University of Pennsylvania), Francesca Gino (Harvard Business School), and David Hofmann (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) have found. And quieter leaders solicit others’ opinions more often than leaders who talk more, a dynamic that enhances team performance, Leigh Tost (University of Michigan), Richard Larrick (Duke University), and Gino found in another study.

These findings suggest skills that extroverted negotiators might absorb from their introverted counterparts. In particular, many extroverts could benefit from active listening—the process of paraphrasing what one has heard without judgment, asking open-ended questions that require elaboration, and identifying and acknowledging the other party’s underlying emotions. They would also be wise to resist the impulse to make decisions at the table and take time for quiet reflection. By talking less, extroverts may find that they learn more.