

John Liptak

Succeeding as an Introvert

JOHN LIPTAK

SUCCESSING AS AN INTROVERT

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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PREFACE

Pretend you are at a party. You watch Jennifer as she navigates the party. She is smiling and laughing as she interacts with others. She moves from person to person, chatting with people she does not even know. She is energized as she talks with more people. Jennifer craves stimulation as she shares her energy, excitement, and enthusiasm with everyone around her. She shares personal information freely and communicates with grace and ease. As an introvert, Jennifer loves the party.

As an introvert at the party, you are standing in the corner trying to find a way to leave. You are wondering how much longer you need to stay to be politically correct. You hope that nobody comes over to talk with you. You keep looking at your watch, and time is passing very slowly. You have gone to the bathroom several times just to get a break away from people. Your energy is draining as each time you must “chit-chat” with others at the party. You feel stuck, helpless, and irritable. You see another person who is approaching the party like you. You cautiously approach the person and start a conversation. You go outside with the person to have a quiet conversation.

If you feel like this in various situations, you are probably an introvert. As an introvert, you would probably find this type of party draining too. As an introvert, gatherings with lots of people drain your energy quickly. You would probably prefer to be in a substantial conversation with one or two people. You also prefer quiet time for solitude and reflection. This book will help you to identify and utilize your strengths as an introvert. Your introverted personality can be a gift that allows you to live well in an extroverted world without apologizing.

This book will teach you how to capitalize on your introverted personality by embracing your strength as an introvert – calm, composed, and confident that you will succeed. This book will help you to....

- Understand the differences between introversion and extroversion.
- Explore how introverted you are.
- Explore and understand common introvert misconceptions.
- Engage in self-care activities for your introverted personality type.
- Learn ways to reenergize when your energy drains.
- Explore how to navigate social situations and avoid loneliness.
- Take advantage of your introverted personality characteristics.
- Succeed in a workplace designed for extroverts.

1 WHAT IS AN INTROVERT?

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Introversion is a fundamental personality style characterized by a preference for an inner life of the mind over the outer world of other people. Introversion sits on a continuum at the opposite end of extroversion. Therefore, an introvert is a person with qualities of a personality type known as introversion. Introverts feel comfortable focusing on inner thoughts and ideas, need time alone, and enjoy spending time with just a few people rather than crowds. As you can see, introverts use energy differently than extroverts. The following examples reflect the differences between extroverts and introverts.

- Introverts draw energy from the inner world of ideas, emotions, imagination, and intuition. They are drained of energy quickly and then must isolate themselves to rejuvenate. Introverts get overstimulated by the external world and feel the need to retreat. They feel anxious when their senses become overstimulated. Thus, they experience the need to limit the number of people with whom they interact and the time they spend in social situations. Introverts feel drained of energy in social situations with large numbers of people. They usually seek to balance this social time with alone time. If they don't have time alone, they experience exhaustion. Introverts who successfully balance alone energy and social energy work well, connect to creativity, and enjoy both their social and work lives.
- The outside world energizes extroverts. They love going to social activities, meeting new people, traveling, and engaging with others socially. They lose energy when they engage in social interactions for extended periods, when asked to work by themselves, or engage in solitary activities such as reflection, meditation, or camping alone. Unlike introverts, extroverts need to balance engaging in activities with others and being by themselves. They love large crowds, group activities or projects, and action-oriented endeavors. Extroverts have numerous broad interests and enjoy being the center of attention. They thrive around other people and have many friends. Extroverts are outgoing, optimistic, and not afraid to take risks.

Whether you are an introvert or an extrovert depends on how you process the world around you. Most people are not purely introverted or extroverted but fall somewhere in the middle with a few characteristics of both. Some characteristics may be more substantial, which is why people may self-identify as an introvert or extrovert. The purpose of this book is to help you learn to accept your introversion and use it to be successful.

1.2 INTROVERT SELF-ASSESSMENT

The first person to talk about the advantages of being an introvert was Carl Jung, who said introversion is a temperament shared by many people. Jung began using the terms introvert and extrovert, and Myers and Briggs adopted Jung's thinking in the development of the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). According to Jung, the primary difference between introverts and extroverts is how they get and spend energy. Introverts turn to their minds to recharge, while extroverts seek other people for their energy needs. Introversion is different from shyness or being withdrawn. Every introvert is unique, but there are some common signs you're an introvert. Of the 20 statements, how many would you circle "Yes?"

I feel drained of energy when I am around too many people	YES	NO
I enjoy being alone by myself	YES	NO
I need rest after outside activities	YES	NO
I have small group of very close friends	YES	NO
I feel nervous in large groups of people	YES	NO
People describe me as "quiet"	YES	NO
People believe it is difficult to get to know me	YES	NO
Too much stimulation hinders my ability to focus	YES	NO
I am a very self-aware and reflective person	YES	NO
I learn by watching others and then practicing on my own	YES	NO
I prefer to work independently	YES	NO
I find it hard to start conversations with people I don't know well	YES	NO
I think things through carefully before speaking	YES	NO
I do not like being the center of attention	YES	NO
I daydream or use my imaginations to work out a problem	YES	NO
I retreat into my mind to rest and rejuvenate	YES	NO
I prefer to listen more than talk	YES	NO
I like to rehearse before speaking	YES	NO
I am uncomfortable in new surroundings	YES	NO
I feel drained after social situations	YES	NO

If you circled 0-7 YES statements, you are probably more extroverted.

If you circled 8-12 YES statements, you are probably in the middle between introverted and extroverted.

If you circled 13-20 YES statements, you are probably more introverted.

1.3 INTROVERSION IS NOT SHYNESS

Although people use the terms “introvert” and “shy” interchangeably, they are quite different. As noted in the Introduction, introverts usually avoid social events because socializing drains their energy. On the other hand, shy people avoid socializing out of fear of the unfamiliar or being the center of attention.

Shyness is extreme self-consciousness when someone is around other people. Unlike introverts, shy people do not feel a loss of energy around other people. They lack confidence in social situations. They are worried about what other people think of them. Introversion is a personality trait of about one-third of all people. On the other hand, shyness is what people believe that other people *think* they are.

- Shy people fear the thought of talking to people they do not know well.
- Shy people fear speaking in front of groups of people.
- Shy people are concerned about making a fool of themselves.
- Shy people fear being judged and rejected.
- Shy people will not share information about themselves unless they are entirely comfortable.

The following examples illustrate the differences between someone shy and someone introverted.

Jonathan is shy and feels awkward or uncomfortable in social situations. He does not like settings where there are strangers with whom he must interact. Jonathan often feels so nervous that his hands get sweaty, and he feels like he has a panic attack. His heart beats fast, and he often gets a stomachache. Thus, Jonathan prefers to skip social events. When he does go to a social activity, Jonathan experiences negative thoughts that cause fear.

Gretchen is introverted and would also prefer to skip social events. Gretchen feels worn out during the networking and socializing process. While she enjoys socializing with people whom she knows and has common interests, Gretchen gets nervous at the thought of being around a large group of people she does not know. Gretchen works so hard to be upbeat and social that she feels drained afterward. She feels more energized or comfortable doing things on her own or with one or two other people.

As can be seen, introversion is a personality type, while shyness is an emotion. The two characteristics can occur together or separately.

1.4 COMMON INTROVERT MISCONCEPTIONS

Many misconceptions are associated with introverted people. Many extroverts often do not understand how introverts operate. Introversion is one of the most frequently misunderstood personality traits. The following are some of the most common misconceptions about introverts.

Myth: Introverts need to be more extroverted

Fact: Introverts are not broken and don't need to be "fixed." If being an introvert is part of who you are, you need to accept it, overcome challenges, and utilize your innate strengths. You should embrace your introverted nature and use it as a source of strength. Introverts don't want to be extroverted, nor do they need to change their primary personality type. While introverts may envy an extrovert's ability to think quickly or fit naturally into a social situation, they also like living in their inner world with lots of alone time. Introverts have many strengths that extroverts may even envy.

Myth: Introverts are antisocial

Fact: Introverts are social in a different way than extroverts. As an introvert, you need fewer relationships but need intimacy and connection in these relationships.

Myth: Introverts are self-centered

Fact: Introverts focus on the internal world and reflect on what you are feeling and experiencing. This reflection allows you to easily have empathy for other people.

Myth: Introverts are not influential leaders

Fact: The truth is that if you are an introvert, you can be an effective leader. You need to use your introverted strengths rather than trying to be like extroverted leaders. You can rely on strengths such as active listening skills, thoughtful nature, thoughtful decision-making, and creative imagination.

Myth: Introverts are boring

Fact: Because introverts prefer the inner world of their thoughts, they are quiet but not necessarily boring. However, you excel in small groups of several people, are reflective, and generate innovative ideas.

1.5 YOU ARE PROBABLY AN INTROVERT IF

Introversion is a personality type, and Carl Jung discovered some of the characteristics of an introverted personality type. Here are some essential characteristics of an introvert. How many apply to you?

You enjoy spending time alone. Although some introverts enjoy social time in small groups, all introverts enjoy the solitude of spending time alone. If you are an introvert, you find that alone time allows you to refresh, recharge, and recuperate after engaging in social situations. **How do you recharge when you feel drained?**

Socializing drains you. Introverts feel drained when they interact with new people, large crowds, or in noisy environments. **How do you feel after socializing for a long time?**

You work best alone. Introverts dislike working in open spaces and crowded environments. The more secluded you are, the more likely you are to focus profoundly and produce great work. You are creative, focused, and productive when you can work without distractions. You can work on teams, but you like to retreat somewhere quiet once you have finished collaborating. **How do you find ways to work alone?**

You live in a vivid, rich inner world. Introverts spend much time thinking and dreaming. You probably think things through before acting and find the inner world more comfortable than the real world. **How is your inner world more comfortable than the real world?**

You tend to live “in your head.” Introverts spend time imagining and daydreaming about how something might look. While extroverts are quick to act, you spend time thinking and visualizing before acting. You may even zone out during a conversation or meeting to pursue your thoughts. **In what ways do you live in your head?**

You dislike the spotlight. Introverts prefer not to speak in large groups. Because of this, you often delegate speaking roles to others. You can learn and master speaking skills, but you would prefer to avoid group participation. **What happens to you when you are in the spotlight?**

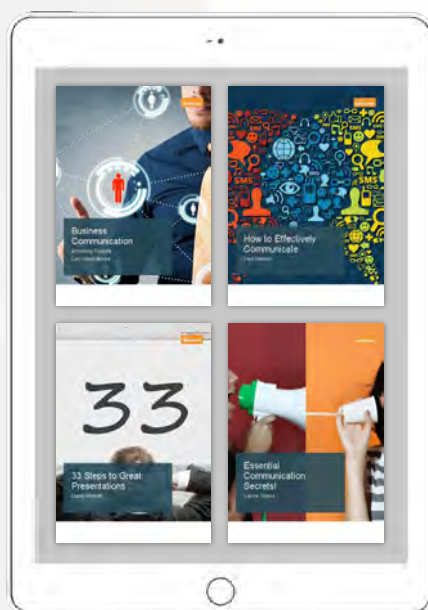
You don't always know what to say. While in conversations, introverts think of the proper response during the conversation or after the conversation is over. Because you are thinking of the correct response while others are talking, you seem cold and lack listening skills. **In what ways do you seem aloof when talking to others?**

You prefer writing to speaking. Many introverts are better at writing their thoughts than telling them. You are more comfortable writing something than saying it in person. **How do you use written words more effectively than spoken words?**

You are reflective. Introverts spend time alone reflecting on their lives, regrets, achievements, people you love, career, and the “big questions” in life. **On what do you reflect most?**

You deep dive. Introverts go deep into subjects of interest. You spend time reading, researching, and creating related to topics of interest. You find this time diving deep into your interests, both relaxing and rejuvenating. **About what issues do you dive deep?**

You are deep. Introverts typically are deep thinkers. You think deeply about the world, the afterlife, how to live well, help others, and the meaning of life. **How is meaning vital in your life and career?**



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2 SELF-CARE FOR INTROVERTS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

"Solitude is where I place my chaos to rest and awaken my inner peace."

– Nikki Rowe

Being an introvert can be challenging at times. In a world that prizes socializing, networking, collaborating, and being social online, introverts often feel like they can never get ahead and find happiness. As an introvert, you are often at a disadvantage in the workplace and society. You may even feel out of place in an “extroverted” society. Extroverts often don’t notice it, but our culture assumes that people should be chatty, social, and quick to speak up – pretty much all the time.

- Did you feel pressure to talk more even at a young age?
- Did you always feel out of place?
- Did you wonder if there was something wrong with you for not being more social?
- Because you often prefer quiet or alone time, did others think you were cold, aloof, or even antisocial to others that are more extroverted in nature?
- Did you feel like a square peg jammed into a round hole?

Introverts often feel out of place in this extroverted world, much in the way that left-handed people find that many things are designed with right-handed people in mind. Although there are times when you may have to get “up” emotionally and psychologically to meet these challenges, you can do so and still be proud to be an introvert. Introverts may also experience challenges in connecting with others while engaging in face-to-face networking. To a certain extent, you will find that you need to be social to meet your career goals. Because introversion is a personality trait, researchers think it is a stable characteristic at the core of your being. Although you can make minor changes to feel comfortable, introversion is a part of who you are. You need to accept this part of your personality and stop trying to change your personality type.

In other words, your personality is those tendencies or preferences that facilitate particular behaviors within a context. Because introversion is part of your personality, you need to celebrate the inner strength, uniqueness, and influence of being an introvert. Introverts enhance energy supplies by quiet and reflective time instead of extroversion, in which individuals are energized by being around others. The following section describes the connection between introversion and body physiology.

2.2 PHYSIOLOGY OF AN INTROVERT

You will find that there is a correlation between your introverted personality and body physiology. Because of this, you will find yourself demonstrating specific ways of interacting with the world. Introversion is easy to read and understand once you know how physiology affects thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Marti Olsen Laney has explored how an introvert's physiology influences reactions and decisions. She explains three ways that physiology affects introverts.

Brain-Body Circuits

Laney found that the introverted brain has a high level of internal activity and thinking. Because of this, these buzzing brains trigger certain behaviors.

- Introverts reduce eye contact when speaking to focus on collecting words and thoughts. Eye contact increases when introverts are listening to take in information.
- Introverts shy away from too much attention or focus.
- Introverts appear dazed or zoned out when they are stressed, tired, or in groups of people.

Drilling Down

Laney found that introverts are continually storing information into long-term memory to locate this information later.

- Introverts begin talking in the middle of a thought.
- Introverts demonstrate clearer thoughts, ideas, and feelings after sleeping.
- Introverts are not aware of thoughts unless they write or talk about them.

Conserving Energy

Laney found that introverts possess a long acetylcholine pathway that allows them to throttle down. The neurotransmitter acetylcholine maintains and strengthens the neural connections responsible for a sharp memory. Because of this long pathway, introvert's parasympathetic nervous system slows down, allowing them to contemplate and examine a situation.

- Introverts are slow to react under stress.
- Introverts have trouble getting motivated or moving.
- Introverts need breaks to restore energy.
- Introverts have a calm and reserved manner.

2.3 WAYS TO ENERGIZE

Introverts find energy in the internal world of ideas, impressions, and imagination. If you are an introvert, your focus is primarily in your head. Therefore, when you interact with the external world for too long, you need to reenergize. You need a quiet reflection place where you can think and recharge, time and space to restore energy, and ways to protect your energy. You should set boundaries with people who drain your energy, monitor the demands people place on you, and watch the tendency to push too hard and not take breaks. The following are some ways to recharge your internal battery.

2.3.1 ELIMINATE STIMULI

Eliminate noise. Because introverts are sensitive to all types of stimulation, noise is often the most significant source of over-stimulation. You can either enjoy silence or put on relaxing background music.

Turn off the lights. Because visual stimulation can drain your energy, you can try turning off the lights, and closing the blinds for a while can ease overstimulation.

Take a Nap. If possible, you should try to take thirty-minute naps during the day. You should go to a dark, quiet bedroom and allow yourself to recharge.

Turn off your phone and other electronics. Take an hour to turn off your phone and other technology. During this time, you should not connect to social media sites, read texts, or look at computer screens.

Create a safe space. Designate a specific area where you can go to be alone, recharge your batteries, and unwind.

Practice mindfulness meditation

You can develop mindfulness through observing and attending to an object. Directing your attention outwardly from yourself to an object can lead to present moment, non-judgmental mindfulness. Try the following activity for about two or three minutes when you need to reset and recharge.

1. Choose an object on which you would like to concentrate.
2. Relax and focus your attention on the object for as long as you can.
3. Try not to let your gaze wander, and if it does, return your focus.
4. Do not judge or think about the object in any way. Simply observe it.
5. Appreciate the qualities of the object.

2.3.2 ENJOY INDIVIDUAL PURSUITS

Introverts tend to get tired, irritable, and feel drained when they are around too many people for too long. They need time with their thoughts to regain energy. Introverts need to think that other people, especially extroverts, understand and accept these needs. However, introverts still feel much pressure to attend social gatherings and spend time with other people. You need to realize that it is okay to things by yourself. You *need* this time to turn off the internal dialog by immersing yourself in various individual pursuits. The following are some ways to enjoy personal pursuits.

- You can engage in solo hobbies like camping by yourself, birdwatching, or playing chess against a computer.
- You can take time to go shopping by yourself. Be careful to avoid stores that are noisy and have visually stimulating environments.
- While you probably enjoy being at home, you can relax by taking a long drive. Put on some good music, or drive in silence and let your mind wander.
- If you are interested in aromatherapy, you can rest in a quiet room and use scented candles to help you relax and recharge.
- You can take a long, hot shower.
- You can take a solo weekend away by yourself to devote that time to just relaxing and caring for yourself.
- You can be creative, write a poem or story, engage in crafts, bake something creative, paint something, sing, play a musical instrument, or journal about your day.
- Watch a movie by yourself to turn your brain off.
- You can take long, deep breaths to lower stress hormones in the body, lower blood pressure, stimulate the lymphatic system, and recharge your introvert battery.
- You can write in your journal. Journaling can be a great way to reflect on your day, explore your thoughts, and write about your goals.

- You can listen to your favorite music to block out the world and recharge.
- You can engage in a creative hobby such as photography, painting, writing poetry, playing music, scrapbooking, or making jewelry.
- You can curl up with a good book can also be an excellent way to recharge. Because you have a rich inner world and enjoy spending time in your head, reading and enjoying your inner world can help boost energy levels.

2.3.3 ENJOY PHYSICAL PURSUITS

Clean. As an introvert, you probably love to be at home because it's a safe space. Because of this, you should try and make this safe space as tidy and cozy as possible. Your environment can energize you or drain you. If your space is messy and cluttered, it can create visual overstimulation and drain your batteries. When your area is clean, it allows your brain to relax and feel calm. So whether you enjoy cleaning or not, spending 15-30 minutes tidying your space can be a form of self-care for introverts because afterward, you feel so good.

Cook or bake. Food can make you feel relaxed. It can be cool and refreshing or warm and comforting. It can bring up special memories and make you think of certain seasons. Cooking and baking can help introverts stop the stream of thoughts in your head.

Garden. Having indoor plants or an outside flower, vegetable, or herb garden can increase your health and happiness! Plants not only produce oxygen but also reduce toxins in the air.

Yoga. Yoga is a combination of meditation and exercise. Because yoga encourages you to dig deeper inside yourself, it can be the perfect physical pursuit. While engaged in yoga, you will connect with your breathing and bodily movements.

Take a walk. Walking can be extremely relaxing if you get outside of your mind while walking. A calm walk in nature can help you gain perspective and ground yourself.

Soft martial arts. Gentle martial arts signify a yielding, accepting, or non-resistive mindset. These martial arts rely on generating and using QI, or vital life force. You could engage in such soft martial arts as Tai Chi and Aikido.

Exercise. When you engage in various forms of exercise, you reduce stress and get outside of your head. Whether that includes walking, running, jump roping, yoga, Pilates, or dancing, any form of movement that gets your heart rate up or encourages deep breathing is good.

Travel. Many introverts enjoy traveling by themselves. Traveling solo means you have complete control of your itinerary, so you can go anywhere and do anything.

2.3.4 ENJOY TECHNOLOGICAL PURSUITS

Watching documentaries. Introverts enjoy watching television. Introverts usually enjoy documentaries because they are a way to learn about new interests, topics, and cultures. Introverts enjoy deep dives into stories of interest.

Podcasts. One of the most enjoyable pastimes for any true introvert is listening to fun, educational, gripping, or thought-provoking podcasts. You can do this by downloading free podcast apps for your android or iPhone and browse hundreds of thousands of audio podcasts on any given topic. You can also watch free podcasts on YouTube.

Gaming. Although some people view playing video games as strictly a harmful activity that can lead to an addiction to video games, there are many ways that video games can be positive and provide a wide variety of skills and health benefits. As an introvert, you will find that there is an allure to online gaming. Online gaming presents challenge, triumph, adventure, engaging stories, the opportunity to create and build friendships with other players online.

Start a blog. Blogs are discussion or informational websites published on the internet that consist of discrete, often informal diary-style text entries. Posts are typically displayed in reverse chronological order so that the most recent post appears first at the top of the web page. You can begin your blog on topics of interest to you.

Take online courses. The internet provides many potential pursuits for introverts. You can take online courses to learn about anything of interest in the comfort of your own home. You should look for free online courses.

3 INTROVERTS IN SOCIAL SITUATIONS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The most significant differences between extroverts and introverts occur in social settings. While extroverts are very social and generate energy from being engaged with other people, introverts are selectively social and expend energy when engaging with other people. Introverts can be talkative in comfortable situations like at home. However, they will probably be quiet in places where they must be more social. Introverts are attentive and will make eye contact with the person they are listening to, and rarely interrupt. Introverts are shy, timid, and reserved. They take time to open up to people and make friends. However, contrary to popular opinion, introverts do like socializing and going out just like extroverts. The only difference is that while extroverts can always be surrounded by a group of people and be the center of everyone's attention, introverts need some time alone to recharge and gain energy.

- Introverts tend to be quiet and subdued. They dislike being the center of attention, even if the attention is positive. It's not surprising, then, that introverts don't brag about their achievements or knowledge. They may know more than they'll admit.
- While introverts may appear to lack social skills or be antisocial, neither is true. Their style of social interaction is simply different from that of extroverts. They tend to listen more than they talk and are excellent listeners.
- Dealing with large groups of people can be nerve-racking for introverts. When introverts get tired in a large group, or too much is going on, they may show little animation, with little facial expression or body movement.
- When they talk, introverts tend to say what they mean and may look away from the other person. They dislike small talk and would rather say nothing than something they feel is insignificant. Although introverts are quiet, they will talk incessantly if they're interested in the topic. They also dislike being interrupted when they talk or work on a project.

While they do like going out, introverts often have a hard time putting themselves out there and interacting with new people. I use the remainder of this chapter to introduce you to some ways to make socializing easier.

3.2 COMMON SOCIAL MISCONCEPTIONS

A misconception is a view or opinion that is incorrect because based on faulty thinking or understanding. If you are an introvert, you are aware of the different misconceptions that have been perpetuated over the years. Introverts know that these misconceptions are incorrect. The following are some of the fundamental misconceptions about introverts and their behavior.

Introverted people are shy. False! Some introverts may be shy, but this is not the case for all introverts.

Introverted people are socially awkward. False! Many introverts can be quite charismatic in social situations. Introverts are not automatically shy.

Introverted people hate being around others. False! Introverts do not hate people. They hate small talk with people. Introverts often avoid small talk because they consider it to be inauthentic. They crave meaningful connections in their conversations.

Introverted people do not like to socialize. False! Introverts would rather hang out with a few close friends than a large group of people. These “small-group” interactions don’t drain them. But once they get to a party or large group setting, they know it’s only a matter of time before they feel exhausted.

Introverted people are rude to others. False! Introverts simply become drained in social situations. They start to get irritable or zone out. They then seek out places where they can be alone and recharge.

Introverted people are unfriendly. False! Some people may think that introverts are unfriendly because they dislike large groups, prefer alone time rather than conversation, and are reflective. These facts are preferences based on their personality types.

Introverted people are hard to get to know. False! Introverts prefer to have deep friendships with a handful of people. They may be quiet around people who want to chit-chat, but they develop close, meaningful relationships with a small group of people.

Introverts don’t like talking. False! Introverts don’t like pointless small talk.

Introverts always want to be left alone. False! Introverts prefer to spend time alone because time with others drains their energy.

3.3 BEING AN INTROVERT IN SOCIAL SITUATIONS

Are there disadvantages to being an introvert? Yes, introverts often have difficulty in social situations. In Figure 1 ConnectUS describes why introverts dislike social situations and why socializing drains energy.

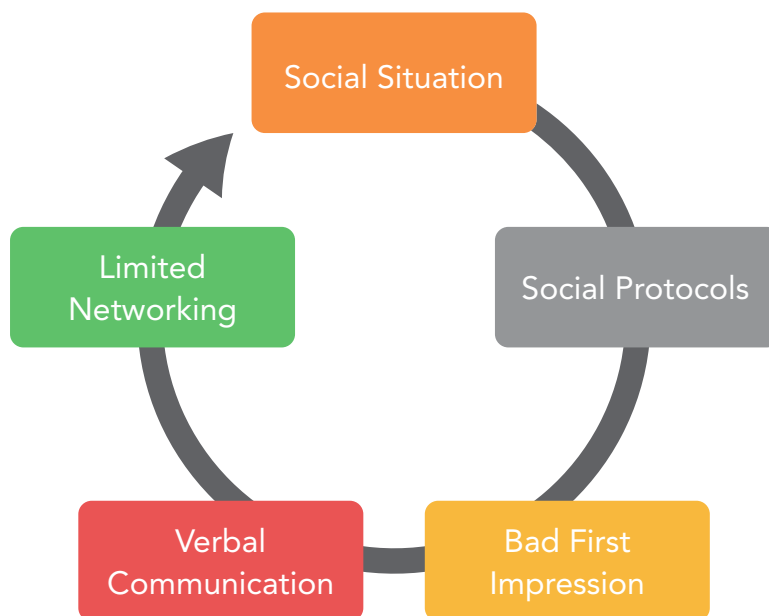


Figure 1: Introverts in Social Situations.

1. **Social protocols.** While you may not set out to be rude, there are elements to your behavior that can rub people the wrong way. For you, as an introvert, it means social protocols make you nervous.
2. **Bad first impression.** As mentioned before, you may seem aloof and uninterested in others. This perception can be particularly true when you first meet people.
3. **Verbal communication.** Some introverts find verbal communication to be challenging. When you find yourself feeling stress, your difficulties with communication can become even more pronounced.
4. **Limited networking.** Introverts are capable of networking, but it can be hard work. You can excel at networking despite being an introvert. However, you may find networking to be difficult and stressful. Because of the potential stress, many people choose to avoid it altogether.

3.4 BEING SOCIAL

Although introverts feel their energy drain in social situations, you can use some tools and techniques to make the most of social situations in which you find yourself.

3.4.1 RELAX BEFORE SOCIALIZING

If you are like most introverts and get extremely anxious at the thought of being in social situations, you can benefit from using quick ways to reduce your anxiety. One of the first symptoms of your anxiety is when you begin to breathe more shallowly and faster. Learning to slow your breathing down will help to relax you and calm your anxiety. Try the following breathing exercise. It is best if you read through the exercise and then try it.

- Sit comfortably in your chair with your back straight and your shoulders relaxed. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach.
- Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose for about four seconds. The hand on your stomach should rise, while the hand on your chest should move very little.
- Hold the breath for two seconds.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth for about five seconds, pushing out as much air as you can. The hand on your stomach should move in as you exhale, but your other hand should move very little.
- Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Focus on keeping a slow and steady breathing pattern of 4-in, 2-hold, and 5-out.

3.4.2 REVERSE NEGATIVE THINKING

Introverts often dwell on negative thoughts about being in social situations. These thoughts enhance rather than reduce their anxiety. The good news is that it is possible to turn your negative thinking into more positive thinking. One way to do this is to be mindful of what is happening in your mind. In this case, you can use mindfulness to attend to the stream of thoughts that go through your head. Look at an example:

- Negative thought: “People just don’t like me.”
- Feelings that follow include low self-esteem, emptiness, fear, and hopelessness.
- Ask, “What is the evidence?” There is probably no evidence that people don’t like you.
- How to reverse your thinking: “Everyone has people who connect with them and people who don’t. If some people don’t like me, it’s okay.”

3.4.3 REJECT REJECTION

Many introverts are unwilling to take a chance to meet new people. Rejection is a part of everyone’s life, not just yours. You need to learn to rise above rejection and learn to enjoy a certain amount of socializing. The best way to do this is to affirm your worth. You can use affirmations like the following ones before entering a social situation.

- “I am a valuable human being, and that fact does not change even if someone rejects me.”
- “I will not take rejection personally. I am the same person, even if I get rejected. No situation and no person can diminish me.”
- “I can learn many things from being rejected. I believe that every experience is a perfect lesson made just for me. I can learn from each experience and prepare better for future situations.”
- “I am as good as everyone else. Nobody is better than me, and no one is worse than me. All people have value.”
- “I am good enough!”
- “I am not alone. Many successful people in our society have the same fears as I do. They found ways to overcome their introversion.”

3.4.4 ATTEND TO OTHERS

To build relationships with other people, you need to show them that you are genuinely interested and attend to what they say and do. When you begin practicing some of these techniques, you will see how quickly you can feel comfortable with new people you meet and build better relationships with those you already know. Although most introverts lose energy when communicating with others, there are some ways to continue attending to other people in social situations.

- Squarely face the other person and use positive body language.
- Open your posture by allowing your arms to fall freely by your side,
- Allow your body to relax by taking a deep breath and letting it out slowly.
- Lean slightly towards the person to show interest in what the person is saying.
- Maintain eye contact but do not stare.
- Move closer to the person, but do not cross over any personal boundaries.
- Stay focused on what the speaker is saying and listen without interrupting.
- Nod to suggest you understand what the person says.
- Say things like “yes” or “uh-huh” to encourage the speaker to continue.
- Keep your posture open to the person by keeping your arms unfolded and uncrossed.

3.4.5 STOP THE ENERGY DRAIN

One of the biggest challenges of introverts involves interacting with people in social situations. If you are an introvert, you feel your energy drain as you interact for a long time. You probably are okay with small groups of people but tend to panic when interacting with large groups of people. You probably ask, “Why do I feel so tired when I’m around people?” The answer is simple. When you are in large groups, you expend excess energy because you process so much more of everything that’s going on around you. Because you intake tons of information, you get exhausted in social situations. You can stop this energy drain by using the following behavioral strategies:

1. **Go into large social settings with a specific goal.** If you’re going to a conference, make the goal to get to know a certain number of your peers or potential mentors (or whatever type of person is relevant to the event for you).
2. **For each social situation, seek to connect with a specific number of people.** Your mind will have something to fixate on when in large groups and reduce some of the mental chatter.
3. **Time yourself.** You need to get good at gauging how much time you can manage in groups, whether at a party or a work-themed event. If you can only manage a few hours, cut it off after that. If you push yourself, you’ll end up exhausted, so seek to pace yourself. Do not feel guilty for having to leave a social situation.
4. **Visualize a successful encounter.** You should mentally run through various scenarios in your head. You will then feel more comfortable in real-life situations.
5. **Be reflective.** After you engage in a social situation, take some time to reflect on how the experience felt. What about the situation was positive? What about the situation was negative?

Solitude for an introvert is like jumping into an incubator filled with a special energy that jumpstarts your entire being, so getting a feel for the right balance between solitude and social environments is critical.

4 TAKING ADVANTAGE OF INTROVERSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Many introverted people feel like they are at a disadvantage in a society that seems to value extroverted traits. Many people feel like the only way to be successful is to call attention to yourself, network, speak confidently, and be social at all times. Many introverts feel like they and their accomplishments go unnoticed and unappreciated. Despite this perception, there are many ways that introverts are better prepared to succeed than extroverts. Some introverts even feel like they have an advantage over their extroverted counterparts. Let's look at several examples of introverts who took advantage of their introversion to make significant accomplishments.

CREATIVITY: For J.K. Rowling, introversion led to the creation of an entire fictional universe. She says she was “too shy” to ask anyone for a pen, so instead spent those four hours dreaming up the world of Harry Potter. Rowling wrote the final book of her series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, in a tranquil, quiet hotel room she rented out in Edinburgh. Rowling always thought she was better at writing than speaking. She says she is always happiest alone in a room where she could use her imagination.

TIME FOR QUIET REFLECTION: Albert Einstein is well-known for his brilliant mind and numerous contributions, including the theory of relativity. Einstein's scientific discoveries were groundbreaking, but people admired Einstein for his profoundly reflective approach. He believed that science and philosophy should always inform one another. Einstein is considered by many to be the definition of a genius. And, as an introvert, he recognized the importance of solitude in enabling him to achieve his profound insights.

USE TIME TO RECHARGE WELL: Oprah Winfrey was one of the first talk-show hosts to talk openly on TV about her weight struggles, past drug usage, and experiences of childhood sexual abuse. In more ways than one, she has proven herself a woman of deep courage. Many people are shocked to discover that Oprah considers herself an introvert. Oprah once revealed that she often retreats during dinner parties and after shows to “recharge.” Oprah has learned as an introvert to pace herself and use solitude to recharge before interacting with people again.

You need to stop comparing yourself to social extroverts in your life. You are never going to enjoy being the life of the party or the center of attention. You will never seek out large groups of people, network, and socialize. It's okay! You need to accept who you are and take advantage of your introversion. The following are some ways to use your introversion to find happiness in your life.

4.2 BE PRODUCTIVE

Introverts can use their unique personality traits to be as productive as possible at home and in the workplace. Read the following and journal your thoughts.

Be a Good Decision-Maker and Problem-Solver

Because of your brain wiring and body physiology, you are predisposed to caution and reflecting thoughtfully before making decisions. Because you are deliberate and seek solitude, you have an advantage over extroverts in critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision making. Extroverts often get caught up in the constant chaos of day-to-day life, limiting their productivity, innovation, and creativity. **When you go off by yourself to recharge your internal batteries, describe the great ideas that pop into your head, find ways to solve problems, and have insight leading to effective decision-making.**

Use Your Natural Empathy

Because you spend more time reflecting and observing, you can accumulate a deeper understanding of human behavior. You have a deep sense of knowing in understanding other people's emotions and motives. You can usually tell if a person is genuine or inauthentic. You are very observant of the subtle messages other people send through body language and facial expressions, and thus, can easily read people like a book. **How do you use your ability to reflect and put yourself into the shoes of others to understand them better?**

Focus Deeply and Block out Distractions

You enjoy socializing and spend less time in large groups than extroverts. Because of this, you have more time to devote to completing tasks, objectives, and goals. You will seek out spaces that provide you with complete privacy to deliberate, research, and write. You can concentrate and not succumb to the extrovert's need to be with other people. **How do you block out distractions so you can focus on the task at hand and be incredibly productive?**

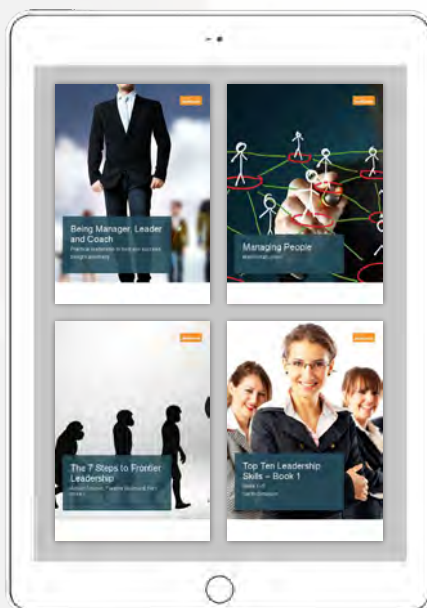
Embrace Independence

Although the modern workplace and society insist on collaboration and teamwork to get things done, you prefer a lifestyle that maximizes autonomy and self-sufficiency. Whenever possible, you enjoy working independently. Because you choose to work independently, you require less supervision and fewer “check-ins” than extroverts. You can work as part of a team, but managers can trust you to get the job done without being distracted by socializing.

How can you make sure that you are a team player yet still feel empowered when you can deal with challenges relying solely on your natural tendencies?

4.3 USE YOUR NATURAL SKILLS

As an introvert, you have unique skills that you need to begin using to be as productive as possible at home and in the workplace.



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Write Rather Than Speak

You probably get nervous when you speak in front of others. You probably like to have time alone to consider their thoughts, write them down, and maybe even rehearse them. When people ask you to speak, you should prepare and rehearse as much as possible. On the other hand, with our online platforms, you can make an impact from a distance through social media. **The following are some ways introverts can effectively use social media:**

- **To promote yourself in the best possible manner, you should strengthen your presence on the most noticeable social networks, including LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter. You should create an introduction to promote yourself.**
- **Use social media to learn about the dynamics and developments in your industry to keep yourself updated about any developments related to your trade.**
- **You should also follow the organizations and bodies in the industry of your trade.**

Tap into Creativity

You spend time in your head thinking about what you have seen and heard. This ability to reflect internally unlocks creativity and innovation. While extroverts tend to go along with the crowd, you use your imagination to dwell on unique solutions to problems through out-of-the-box thinking. Because you spend more time on your own, away from the large social places extroverts commonly occupy, you can develop innovative perspectives, ideas, and insights that are unorthodox and novel. You are more creative and imaginative than extroverts. **How can you capitalize on your natural creativity to help organizations develop creative and innovative products, services, systems, and processes?**

Be Prepared

When it comes to meetings, presentations, and collaborative projects, you like to be the most prepared rather than “winging it.” While extroverts have “thinking on your feet” skills, you have researched, written, and prepared your ideas and thoughts. You should prepare for whatever questions or comments might come your way. When you have completed your homework, prepared talking points, and rehearsed your presentation in an organized manner, you feel comfortable sitting back, considering the discussion, and weighing your responses. **Before what events do you need to prepare? How can you be even more effective?**

4.4 DEVELOP SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

As an introvert, you have unique skills that you need to begin using to be loving, kind, and friendly in your social relationships.

Use Your Natural Listening Skills

As an introvert, you can attend to others and listen to them on a much deeper level than extroverts. You have natural empathy and can easily consider the ideas and feelings of others. In conversations, you take mental notes and focus intently on what the other person is trying to express. Many extroverts are so excited to speak that they interrupt other people trying to communicate their ideas and feelings. Because you process things deeply, you are naturally more receptive and interested in taking in information than divulging it. You have excellent listening skills that can be of value in your social relationships. The following are the top blocks to active listening for introverts. Which ones apply to you?

I. DAYDREAMING: When your attention wanders to other events or people.

II. REHEARSING: When you are thinking about what you will say next and never completely hearing what others tell you.

III. FILTERING: When you listen to certain parts of the conversation, but not all.

Set Your Own Pace

You need to set your own pace and tempo to accomplish your goals without feeling drained of energy or overwhelmed. When you set your own pace, you examine potential situations (especially social situations) to balance your energy supply and the social demands of the situation. When you are unable to pace yourself, you end up stressed and overwhelmed. Marti Olsen Laney suggests introverts examine their body rhythms. **Answer the following questions:**

- **Do I feel peppy or tired in the morning?**
- **Am I tense or relaxed by late afternoon?**
- **Do I come alive or bottom out in the evening?**
- **When do I concentrate best – morning, afternoon, or midnight?**
- **When does my brain seem most frazzled?**
- **What time of day do I most enjoy being with people?**

Be Authentic

You can come across as quiet and disinterested in the initial stages of a romantic relationship. You will need to show excellent communication skills and be upfront about being an introvert. If you are in a relationship with an extrovert, you may find yourself in conflicts. **Here are some tips for being authentic:**

- **Tell your romantic partners when you feel your energy drain and need to recharge.**
- **Recognize when your energy is failing and work to maintain it.**
- **If you have difficulty expressing your feelings to romantic partners, think about your words before saying them.**
- **Push yourself through any discomfort to provide verbal give-and-take with partners.**
- **Show intimacy through warm actions as well as through speaking.**
- **Use your introvert qualities like demonstrating attentiveness, listening attentively, and using appropriate body language.**

Be a Friend

Unlike introverts who make friends quickly and have lots of friends, you believe that your relationships have to be deep and meaningful. You need people with whom you can talk about shared interests. You need both introverted and extroverted friends for variety and fulfillment. **With your extroverted friends, you will maintain your relationship by doing several things:**

- **Explain that you are introverted and socialize differently.**
- **Explain that you are at your best when you feel energized and that going out to social events drains your energy easily.**
- **Invite a select number of friends to your house so that you can control the number of people you entertain at one time.**
- **Clarify that as you start to feel drained of energy, you may need to leave.**
- **Explain that you are not great at making small talk. Reassure friends that this lack of interest in small talk is not a reflection of them.**
- **Be aware of friends who drain your energy. You should try to avoid these energy vampires.**

Cultivate Deep Relationships

In relationships, you prefer quality over quantity. Because you have limited energy in social situations, you are selective. The relationships that you develop and nurture are cherished and treasured by you. Thus, you will have a smaller number but closer and more intimate relationships than extroverts. When you develop friendships, you probably consider them friends for life. Because you don't let just anyone into your circle of friends, you expect trust and loyalty from them. The following are some ways to create close relationships and build strong connections. Rate your skill from 1 (Rarely) to 5 (Often).

Listen carefully by focusing on what others say at the moment rather than how you might respond.

Rarely	1	2	3	4	5	Often
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Pay attention to body language, eye contact, and tone of voice.

Rarely	1	2	3	4	5	Often
--------	---	---	---	---	---	-------

Encourage and empathize by making sure that people feel heard and respected.

Rarely	1	2	3	4	5	Often
--------	---	---	---	---	---	-------

Remain open and honest by expressing your true feelings.

Rarely	1	2	3	4	5	Often
--------	---	---	---	---	---	-------

Show appreciation by offering genuine compliments to the people in your life.

Rarely	1	2	3	4	5	Often
--------	---	---	---	---	---	-------

Make commitments you can keep while not over-committing.

Rarely	1	2	3	4	5	Often
--------	---	---	---	---	---	-------

5 INTROVERTS IN THE WORKPLACE

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Have you ever stopped to think about why being an introvert in the contemporary workplace is so tricky? Introverts are finding that the workplace presents many challenges. Unless you have a job where you can work at home or work alone, you will need to get used to the changing workplace. You need to understand and cope with the potential problems you may encounter in a traditional nine-to-five job.

Some of the most apparent challenges include:

- The modern office's new look, feel, and culture. Employers now encourage employees to work in small groups rather than in individual offices and cubicles. As offices change, introverts notice their anxiety rising. Offices are increasingly open and invite collaboration and sharing.
- Employees are rewarded and promoted for their ability to socialize. In other words, the workplace is now set up to make decisions, brainstorm, and solve problems all within a group setting, and the change is getting worse.
- Supervisors often call on introverts to use skills outside their comfort zone or work in an environment that is not consistent with their introverted personality type.

These extroverted characteristics have seeped deep into the workplace and created some serious pitfalls for the average introvert. Figure 2 describes the difference between introverts and extroverts at work.

INTROVERTS	EXTROVERTS
Like quiet time for concentration	Like to socialize and network well
Seem quiet and aloof	Act without thinking too much
Need to be asked for their opinions and ideas	Good at marketing their skills
Dislike interruptions while working	Like being the center of attention
Enjoy working alone	Get bored easily
Prefer to work in an office or cubicle	Get impatient with repetitive work
Prefer not to socialize	Develop ideas by interacting with others

Figure 2: Differences Between Introverts & Extroverts in the Workplace.

5.2 MANAGING WORKPLACE STRENGTHS

Introverts make excellent employees. They demonstrate this excellence in different ways than extroverts. You need to constantly remind yourself of how you impact the workplace. The following are some of the ways you improve the workplace in your own introverted way.

Be insightful & empathetic. Because you listen more than you speak and take in tremendous amounts of data about other people, you have a natural tendency to be both insightful and empathetic. You notice subtle hints that others give you about who they are and what is important to them. You understand what others are thinking and feeling. You pay attention to the details that most people do not notice. You probably are noticed as someone who cares about others and can put yourself in the place of other employees, colleagues, customers, and clients. **How can you use your insight and empathy to make a significant contribution to your organization?**

Be self-motivated. Introverts are great employees because they care deeply and become completely immersed in work that you enjoy. You crave downtime to relax, work autonomously at your own pace, and do not need much supervision. **Following are some ways to make sure you remain self-motivated:**

- **Use one of your introvert strengths and envision in your mind an outcome of something you need to complete. When you do, your motivational drive kicks in.**
- **When you are working, complete tasks for the joy of helping the customer or client.**
- **Blaming extroverts for your lack of success will stand in the way of your actual motivation to complete a project or a task. When you blame others, you free yourself from committing to your goals.**

Get in the flow. Flow is the mental state of operation in which you perform an activity in which you are fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, totally involved, and wholly enjoying the process of the activity. You're in the flow when you experience such complete absorption in an activity that you lose your sense of space and time. **Ways to get into the flow of your work:**

- **Enjoy the process – not just the destination.**
- **Find something you enjoy doing and concentrate on it.**
- **Remain positive.**
- **Persevere and stick with a task until you complete it.**

5.3 WORKPLACE CHANGES

There are many ways that the workplace has changed. Unfortunately, these changes are not helpful for introverts. Some of the significant changes that are occurring follow. Which ones are problems for you?

Open-Concept Office: Physical walls are coming down, as the open-concept office is everywhere. Businesses are embracing open floor plans and spaces with no offices. If you are an introvert, this “communal” atmosphere scares you. As we noted before, you lose energy when around too many people for too long, so the thought of having people around is scary. Unfortunately, most employers don’t understand that you and other introverts in the workplace need your own space and privacy. You will never be productive when constantly around other people in a group setting. Because introverts need quiet downtime to recharge, you need a space where you can go to think and re-energize. As an introvert, you need to be able to escape from other employees.

Collaboration: In the workplace, employees are encouraged to work in teams. While at one time, individual employees were responsible for organizing and completing tasks, the new workplace relies on teams of people meeting together to solve problems and complete tasks. While this may be a productive way to make accomplishments in the workplace, you may find teams challenging. Because you value independent thinking, reflection, and the quiet processing of ideas, you prefer autonomy rather than groupthink. While working on teams, you find that you are unable to utilize your strengths.

Micromanagement: People in the new workplace want constant assurance that they are doing their job.

Between team projects, micromanagement from supervisors, and the need to be connected electronically to work on the weekends, you may feel like you must constantly be communicating your value to an organization. Because autonomous decisions and actions are no longer as valuable as they once were, introverts frequently feel on display and judged.

Socializing: Because the workspace is now open, introverts feel bombarded by people. You sometimes may feel like there is nowhere to go to get a few minutes by yourself. Because introverts do not enjoy “small talk,” you think your energy-draining throughout a day of socializing.

Pressure to Self-Promote: Many introverts do not feel the need to promote themselves or talk about their accomplishments. If you are an introvert, you probably downplay your achievements and undersell your abilities. You probably say things like, “Anyone could have done that!” Discomfort with networking and a tendency toward humility can make self-promotion a challenge for many introverts.

5.3.1 WAYS TO MANAGE INTROVERSION AT WORK

Yes, being an introvert in the workplace has its pitfalls. The challenges you face can seem monumental. Although these are the current trends, it's not likely to get any better soon. You have three options:

1. Seek out one of the jobs that are better for introverts.
2. Consider freelancing, consulting, or starting your own business.
3. Seek ways to make sure that you can cope with the workplace changes and challenges.

The remainder of this chapter will focus on ways that you can cope with workplace changes and challenges.

5.4 COPE WITH WORKPLACE CHALLENGES

Because the workplace has changed, you must work to cope with the changes and find ways to overcome the challenges. The following are some ways to enhance coping skills and build resilience in an extrovert-dominated workplace.

Workplace Criticism. Introverts are sensitive and take things to heart. You need to begin viewing constructive feedback and criticism to improve your performance. Take time to process the feedback and accept it. Then decide how you will use the feedback to improve. **The following are some tips for managing workplace criticism:**

- **You may worry about getting the approval of your co-workers or supervisors. Your pride is often dependent on people endorsing your efforts. You should not be afraid of being judged or rejected by others.**
- **You should avoid being overly sensitive to feedback. You may hear feedback as negative criticism, even if others mean it to be helpful. When you overreact, you respond more emotionally or forcibly than is justified. Most over-reactions are due to “all or nothing” automatic thought responses. When you experience automatic thoughts, realize that they are not based on rationality but fearful, overly emotional reactions to stressful situations.**
- **Listen critically to your inner self-talk, and notice when it turns negative. Remember that the voice inside your head is not necessarily accurate.**
- **Use positive affirmations to reflect your negative automatic thoughts. Affirmations allow you to reframe the negative, all-or-nothing thinking by making a positive statement reflecting your new beliefs.**

Anxiety Management. Introverts are prone to being anxious. You probably find situations challenging that others might find completely normal, like speaking in meetings, collaborative activities, retreats, doing presentations, and marketing yourself. You need to remember that a bit of anxiety is a good thing and can help, but too much anxiety can debilitate. It can interfere with your ability to function daily. Feelings of anxiety are often difficult to identify, hard to control, may be out of proportion to the actual danger, and last for long periods of time. Anxiety can even cause you to avoid certain people and particular situations. **The following are some ways to manage your anxiety in the workplace:**

- **Some introverts are so worried about what others will say about them that they miss out on a lot of fun, excitement, and benefits. Stop worrying about what others say!**
- **Many introverts who experience anxiety catastrophize about events and situations in the future. Instead, you need to be mindful. When doing this, you maintain awareness of everything around you, breathe deeply and slowly, and stay in the present.**

Speak Up. As an introvert, you can be quiet. Louder and more persistent voices often drown you out. Sometimes you are quiet in meetings because you question whether your thought is worthwhile or that others will not like your idea. **Here are some ways to speak up at work:**

- **Stay calm and breathe.**
- **Bring attention to any tension in your body and release it.**
- **Stop overthinking and let go of unknown and uncontrollable comments from others.**
- **Speak loudly and clearly. Trust that your ideas and opinions are as valuable as those of other employees.**

Recharge Energy. Whereas extroverts feel energized during and after social interactions, you feel drained and need time to regain your energy level. You might enjoy socializing just as much as extroverts, but you will need to leave space in your schedule to recharge after social events. **The following are some ways to get back to restore your energy level.**

- **You can ask your supervisor if you can work from home.**
- **If you have an office, close the door.**
- **Find a quiet place to which you can retreat.**
- **Determine if you can go outside and walk.**
- **Stay mindful and in the present moment.**

Be Team-Oriented. Rather than vying for the spotlight, you should strive to be supportive, collaborative, and focused on those around us. You should adopt a team-orientation focus and be as collaborative as possible. **How can you be more collaborative and team-oriented when working?**

Think Before Speaking. As an introvert, you are probably more inclined than extroverts to avoid speaking without thinking. You should speak with intention and wisdom. **You can do this in the following ways:**

- **Research and prepare your thoughts as much as possible.**
- **Take the time to think things through and word your thoughts carefully.**
- **Gather your thoughts before speaking in public.**

Lead by Example. You may worry that you don't have what it takes to be a great leader. Many of the best leaders in business are introverts and prefer their alone time. Bill Gates and Warren Buffett are two successful introverts. You have many of the prerequisites for leadership, including an ability to think before you speak, attend and listen to what other people are saying, and remain calm in times of crisis. After meetings and presentations, you will need an office or space to go to and recharge your batteries. Taking time to recharge can help you envision multiple scenarios, so you are responsive rather than reactive. **What natural leadership skills do you possess?**

6 AVOID LONELINESS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

All introverts find it challenging to be at parties, events, and large social situations. An introvert's body chemistry interprets social situations differently from an extrovert. For some introverts, however, social situations can become so anxiety-producing that they feel immobilized. When an introvert's social anxiety becomes an intense feeling of inadequacy, sensitivity to what others think, and fear of casual conversation, you might be experiencing social anxiety. Your social anxiety can lead to loneliness.

It is essential to identify any specific symptoms of loneliness you are experiencing. Loneliness is an extreme emotional state in which you experience powerful feelings of isolation from others. Lonely people experience various negative thoughts, behaviors, and emotions. Lonely people will exhibit many of the following signs. Which do you recognize in yourself? Place a checkmark in front of the signs that you can identify.

- Feeling empty.
- A sense of being hollow inside.
- Crying a lot of the time.
- Changes in sleeping habits.
- Feeling damaged and unloved.
- Feeling lost with no direction.
- Feeling physical pain akin to a "broken heart."
- Feeling cut off from others.
- Feeling alienated from other people.
- Changes in eating habits.
- Feelings of sadness.
- Feeling as if you have no one on whom you can depend.
- Feeling self-conscious.
- Convinced something is wrong with me.
- Feeling disconnected.
- Feeling as if you can't talk to other people.

If you check more than ten items, you are probably experiencing loneliness.

6.2 SOLITUDE, ISOLATION, & LONELINESS

Human beings, even introverts, are social by nature and need some human interaction and connectedness. Introverts and extroverts experience this need in different ways. Extroverts love socializing with lots of people and feel lonely when they are not with other people. On the other hand, introverts love socializing with a limited number of people for a limited number of hours and feel lonely when they avoid people for too long. When introverts experience adequate levels of human interaction and connectedness, they feel a sense of satisfaction. On the other hand, when introverts experience inadequate levels of interaction and connectedness, they will feel lonely.

Loneliness is a noticeable difference between your desired level of social interaction and your actual level of social interaction. Loneliness occurs when you have no one to talk, relate or share with – even though you want this connection. Introverts need to distinguish between solitude, isolation, and loneliness. If you may enjoy being by yourself at times, as most introverts do, you want solitude. On the other hand, if there are times when you choose not to be alone, and you find yourself feeling very isolated and alone, which often leads to loneliness.

Jeremy is an introvert and loves solitude. He enjoys time by himself, especially after socializing with others for an extended period of time, to recharge his energy level. When Jeremy is alone, he enjoys quiet time to relax, rejuvenate, and recharge after engaging in social situations. Because Jeremy feels bombarded with visual stimuli, conversation, noises, and colors, he can only recover by taking quality alone time. Jeremy prefers solitude when he needs time alone for his mental and emotional health and well-being. He steps away, spends time alone, reflects, and practices mindfulness meditation before he reenters the “real world.”

Kathy is an introvert who isolates herself. Her isolation is a withdrawal from others because she gets tired of being with people. Unfortunately, Kathy’s lack of social isolation often leads to loneliness. Unlike solitude, Kathy cannot benefit from isolation. Kathy’s isolation often happens when other people surrounded her.

Sherry is an introvert, and she is lonely. She has moved to a new city and has no friends. Sherry enjoys solitude and time away from people but craves some social contact. Because she is introverted, Sherry has trouble connecting with other people. Thus, Sherry needs to find ways to connect with other people in her new city.

6.3 DON'T ISOLATE YOURSELF

Introverts often feel isolated and, at times, lonely. An introvert's fear of being around other people can trigger avoidance behaviors. When introverts begin to associate all social situations with stress and anxiety, they tend to begin skipping all social events. If you begin avoiding all social events, you might start to feel isolated and lonely.

Negative feelings of loneliness can lead to various other health-related concerns and stress-related conditions, including heart disease, high blood pressure, and stroke. In addition, when you are lonely, you might experience other problems, including disrupted sleep patterns, eating issues, and poor mental health. Figure 3 illustrates how you negatively reinforce isolating yourself.

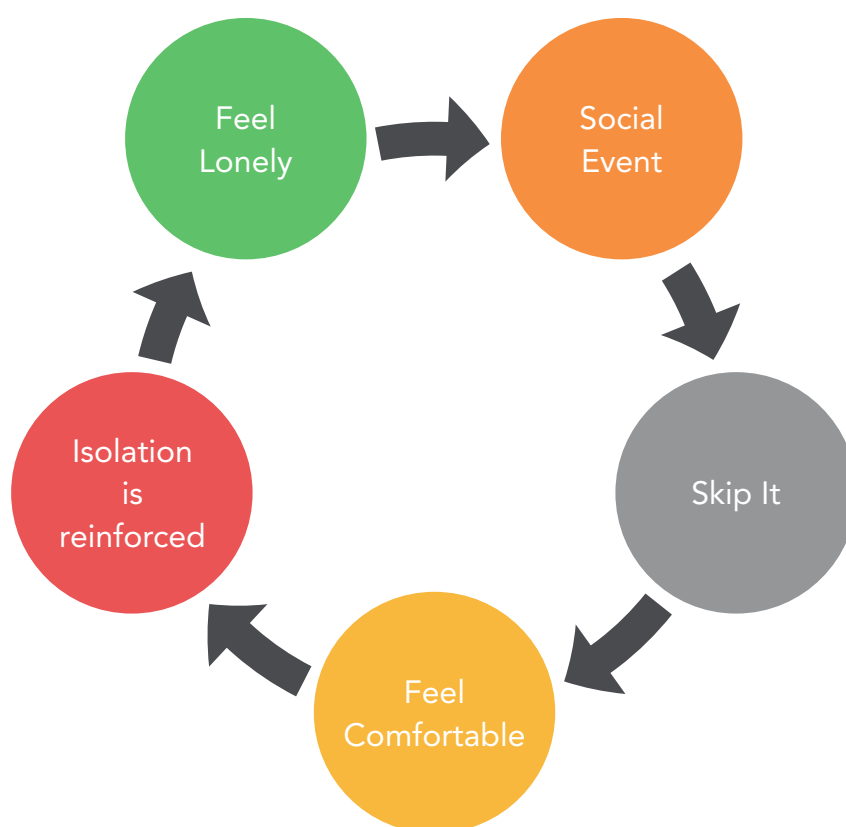


Figure 3: Isolation Becomes a Habit.

If you feel like your anxiety in social situations has become extreme, you should contact a healthcare professional to ensure there is no medical reason for your social anxiety. In the remainder of this chapter, I provide some activities to help you stop isolating yourself.

6.4 TAKE REASONABLE SOCIAL RISKS

There are many different types of techniques you can utilize to overcome isolation and loneliness. These techniques can help you reach out to others, feel comfortable meeting new people, and take social risks.

Liptak and Leutenberg suggest that introverts can be more comfortable in social situations through consistency and practice, just like any other skill. This skill requires you to get out of your present comfort zone and force yourself to interact with other people regularly. You should avoid compartmentalizing and separating your social life from the rest of your life. If you want to be a more sociable person, you should practice some of the following techniques in overcoming isolation and loneliness.

6.4.1 BE INVITING

To become more of a social risk-taker, you need to spend some of your free time with current friends or potential friends. One way to do this is to invite people to do things with you. You can control how many people to whom you extend invitations. Make sure these are the type of friends you share a healthy relationship and be aware of how much your energy drains while with each person. Because you are an introvert, your social group should be just a few people – perhaps one or two at a time. Some ways to invite others to include:

- If you belong to a club, invite others to join.
- If you belong to a particular place of worship, invite someone to go with you.
- If you have a hobby, invite another person to join you.
- If you are going to a movie or shopping, invite someone to join you.
- If you like a specific television show, invite someone over who might enjoy it too.
- If you have read a good book, share it with someone, and discuss it afterward.
- If you see someone eating lunch alone, invite the person to join you.
- If you play chess online, find a person to play face-to-face.

6.4.2 MOVE OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE

As an introvert, you have a social comfort zone. While you often feel most comfortable when alone, have just a few friends, and stay reasonably isolated, it is vital to get out of your comfort zone and meet people. Your comfort zone may feel familiar, keep you at ease and in control, and allow for a low level of anxiety and stress. However, when you're just outside of your comfort zone, you can meet potential friends because you're willing to take risks, and yet at the same time, you're not so far outside your "safe space" that anxiety shuts you down. **How can you get out of your comfort zone to meet new people?**

To be willing to get out of your comfort zone and take more social risks, you need to get over your fear of rejection. Since taking social risks involves a great deal of uncertainty, it can be difficult to reach outside your traditional comfort zone. By getting over your fear of rejection, you will feel more comfortable with uncertainty. **The best way to do this is to think, “What the worst thing that can happen?” and “What is the best thing that might happen?”**

6.5 USE A SOCIAL RISK-TAKING PROCESS

Introverts often have trouble taking social risks. Therefore, you need to learn how, when, and where to approach others and when to keep to yourself. You can learn the social risk-taking process and take risks to meet people when you feel lonely. When in an appropriate and comfortable social situation, try the following process to see if it helps you be more socially comfortable.

- Make eye contact with other people. Once you have established eye contact, provide a friendly smile. If the person does not respond, let it go and try another time. If you still get no response, forget about it!
- If another person makes eye contact and smiles at you, introduce yourself.
- Ask open-ended questions that invite other people to respond with more than a “yes” or “no.” Open-ended questions prompt others to share.
- Give compliments about something that you like or appreciate, like “I like your shoes, where did you get them?”
- Look for common interests by paying attention and be engaging in what excites other people. Even though you do not enjoy it, make small talk and note when the other person gets excited talking about subjects of interest.
- If you hit it off with someone, provide an invitation. For example, you might say, “Let’s play some tennis on Saturday.”
- End by affirming that you enjoyed the conversation. “It was really nice talking with you” or “It was so nice to meet you” to help the other person feel valued.

6.6 MEETING NEW PEOPLE

Introverts have great difficulty meeting new people. When you meet new people, you should always attempt to make the situation as comfortable as possible. When looking at social situations in this manner, you will take the pressure out of meeting people and getting to know them. Think about a situation in which you have avoided because you did not know anyone. Use the tips below to feel more comfortable in meeting new people.

- Try to learn as much as you can about other people. You will be able to relax when you focus on others, and you will be surprised at how your anxiety or feelings of awkwardness go away.
- Answer the questions that people ask you honestly and directly. You are providing information that people request and requesting information from others. Be passionate when you speak, and others will become interested in you.
- Ask people questions about themselves. If you are introverted, approach people and ask good open-ended questions about them. They will reciprocate.
- Be yourself, not the person you think other people want you to be. You have probably heard this a thousand times, but in this case, use it as advice to stop pretending you are someone else to impress people. Trying to be extroverted can blow up in your face. People can easily spot phony people.
- Be as positive as you possibly can be. If you share something seemingly negative happening in your life or about yourself, be as positive as possible and hopeful for the future. Everyone wants to be around positive people, regardless of any difficulties they are facing.
- Listen intently when people are talking, and don't just seem like you are interested. Focus on what they are talking about, rather than worrying about what they are thinking of you. Don't anticipate what you want to say next. Instead, be present and fully attentive to the feelings behind the content of what others say.

7 REFERENCES

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