

Quiet Leadership: How to Harness the Strengths of Introverts to Change How We Work, Lead, and Innovate

Sample Sub-Topics

How to choose and cultivate leaders wisely

What are the unique leadership strengths of introverts and extroverts? We tend to be blinded by charisma when choosing leaders, and introverts are routinely passed over for leadership positions. Yet research shows that introverted leaders deliver equal or superior results, depending on the business situation, and that the status quo amounts to a colossal waste of talent:

- Study by U Chicago, Harvard and Stanford, of 4,591 CEOs of publicly traded U.S. companies, found that extroverted CEOs run companies with a 2% lower return on assets. Introverted CEOs ran companies that outperformed their peers as a whole.
- Jim Collins (author of Good to Great) reviewed the top 11 best-performing companies in the country at the time of his study; all of them were led by CEOs described as quiet, unassuming, soft-spoken, even shy.
- Study of pizza chains by Wharton professor Adam Grant tracked store profits over multiple months. On average, no difference between profitability of stores led by introverts and extroverts ----and when leading proactive employees, introverted leaders brought in 14 percent higher profits (with passive employees, extroverted leaders were 16 percent more profitable).

Charismatic leaders may earn more, but don't deliver better results.

How to best balance the need for solitude & teamwork to stimulate innovation

We live in a cultural moment that I call the New Groupthink, in which we believe that creativity and innovation is produced in teams, together. There's plenty of truth in this. But look at the research on the creative power of solitude:

- Study of 56 adults found that after spending four days immersed in nature, participants improved their performance on a creative problem-solving task by 50%
- When the psychologists Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Gregory Feist studied the lives of the most-creative people across a variety of fields, they almost always found visionaries who were introverted enough to spend large chunks of time alone.

How and when to stretch outside our comfort zones

There's a fine line between stretching outside our comfort zones, and turning ourselves inside out/burning out. This applies to extroverts as well as introverts. How should we all walk this line? How can we make sure to restore our energy after spending lots of time outside those zones? The psychological literature has concrete answers to these questions.

How to harness the best of everyone's ideas

In your typical meeting, 3 people do 70% of the talking, according to a study by Kellogg Business School. How can you design and run meetings so that you get the best of everyone's ideas? If you're an introvert, how can you make your voice and ideas heard? If you're an extrovert, how can you ensure that you're hearing from everyone? We know that brainstorming doesn't work – a study of over 800 teams showed that individuals are more likely than groups to generate a higher number of original ideas. So what should you do?

And here's Steve Wozniak, inventor of the Apple PC:

- “[A]rtists work best alone—best outside of corporate environments, best where they can control an invention’s design without a lot of other people designing it for marketing or some other committee. I don’t believe anything really revolutionary has ever been invented by committee.”

How to overcome any fear

We all have fears, and so do our colleagues, and they dramatically impede our progress in the world. Susan uses the #1 fear of public speaking to illustrate the latest research on fear desensitization and offers practical tips and strategies that can be applied to overcoming any fear.