



Working with Introverts: Six Helpful Things to Know

Description

It's great getting to work with different types of people. Diversity is a wonderful thing. If we all worked and thought the same way, and had the same strengths, weaknesses, temperaments, and preferences, the workplace would be unbalanced. Imagine if everyone brainstormed nonstop and there was nobody to sit down and execute a plan. Or if you had an organization full of "executers" and no creative types to infuse fresh ideas.

It's crucial to understand the differences in people. Not only will it help make sure the right employee is in the right role, it helps us engage, coach, mentor, and develop people. Introverts and extroverts are very different. They respond to different things. Connecting with people in a way that resonates with them is the gateway to engagement, which is a key to retention, productivity, trusting relationships, positivity, and everything else that makes an organization great.

In *The Calling*, I write about using the assessment Management By Strengths (MBS) to help determine people's temperaments by zeroing in on four traits: Directness, Extroversion, Pace, and Structure. This helps us figure out how to leverage their strengths, improve communication with them, work more productively with them, build stronger teams, and so on. I also write about the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to learn how to bring individual strengths and talents together in the best way. I won't go into lots of detail here, but the MBTI measures people in four dimensions: *Extroversion (E) or Introversion (I)*; *Sensing (S) or Intuition (N)*; *Thinking (T) or Feeling (F)*; *Judging (J) or Perceiving (P)*.

I am an ESTJ. My personality type is goal-oriented and decisive. We don't mind making tough decisions and taking action. In fact, sometimes we tend to jump into action a bit too quickly. We also like to talk. I have had the opportunity over the years to work with lots of people who are very different from me. For instance, most physicians tend to be introverted. I've found while I think out loud, introverts are not likely to jump right into a conversation or brainstorming session. They need time to process ideas, study them, and prepare their thoughts before weighing in. This means extroverts and introverts have very different approaches to making big decisions.

Recently I had an interesting conversation with Veronica Villarreal, who is chief ambulatory officer at DHR Health. She is a self-described introvert and had a lot to say about how she prefers to work. I

learned a lot from Veronica, and I want to share a few of her insights and suggestions along with a few guidelines I've discovered over the years.

1. **Introverts may prefer quieter forms of reward and recognition.** They can be uncomfortable with public praise. Veronica says when someone compliments her on, for example, her detailed knowledge of a process, her mind starts racing with questions like: "Do they want me to tell them how long it took me to learn the details?" "Will it sound like I'm being conceited because I'm talking about myself?" She's had to learn to just say "thank you" and realize people are only trying to make a personal connection.

This is why it's vital to ask people how they want to be rewarded and recognized. It's part of the Platinum Rule, which says, "Do unto others as THEY would want done to THEM." (Click [here](#) to learn more about the Platinum Rule and how to use it in Relationship Rounding.)

2. **Hand out meeting agendas in advance, so introverts can have time to get prepared so they can participate.** Veronica says, "One of my biggest pet peeves is not understanding the purpose of a meeting, or the agenda not being presented ahead of time, so I have time to prepare on the topics and actually participate in the meeting instead of having to write down notes and have a follow-up meeting to give my input."

This is something I learned years ago when meeting with a group of physicians to roll out some proposed changes. Remember, physicians tend to be introverts. Our administrative group was excited, but because we didn't give the physicians time to think things over and prepare, they ended up not approving the changes. I now recommend organizations put meeting agendas out at least 24 hours ahead of time. Even longer is better—one organization I worked with gave people 30 days to study change proposals and ask questions so they could prepare to give their input. When we give more time to those individuals who don't think out loud, we can achieve 100 percent involvement in a meeting instead of maybe only 50 percent.

3. **Don't expect introverts to show lots of emotion right away. That is why they can excel in situations where calmness is needed.** Veronica told me that like many introverts, she isn't comfortable with public displays of emotion. She said she started going to the gym from a young age as a way to release strong emotions like sadness or anger. Also, she has learned to express positive emotions like gratitude to others by writing thank-you notes. She said, "It gives me time to gather my thoughts and genuinely express what I want to say."

The lesson is to not misread introverts and think they're not engaged or that they don't care. Something can be really important to them on the inside, but they might not express it as much on the outside. To return to the physician example, being steady and consistent can help them in their job; if they wore their emotions on their sleeve, it could create anxiety for their patients.

4. **Their "focused face" doesn't mean they're upset.** Sometimes people misinterpret introverts' silence and stoic expression as anger. As Veronica puts it, "When someone is speaking to me about an idea they have, or asking me to do something, I tend to be focused on the different scenarios of how it will and won't work by trying numerous things in my head. I sometimes get asked, "Hey, are you okay? Are you mad?" I'm not mad but focused and processing my thoughts. I have learned that I now have to say, "I'm thinking" when I can hear my own breath so others won't think I'm being dismissive or uncooperative."

5. **They can be deeply uncomfortable with public speaking.** As an extrovert, I love speaking to an audience. Many introverts don't feel the same way. Here's how Veronica described what public speaking felt like earlier in her career: "I loved working with different departments on a one-on-one basis, but speaking to an entire room was not my style. My heart would race, I could feel the sweat all over my body due to my adrenaline pumping, and when I stood up and went through my slides, my voice would crack, I could feel the vibe of the room become disengaged, and then, poof, I had lost the attention of all."

After lots of practice, Veronica got much better at public speaking. She suggests introverts seek out as many opportunities as possible to gain experience. She said, "Small, intimate meetings are when I feel more comfortable speaking freely, without having the fear that someone from across the room will shut down my idea because they hear one-third of what I have to say."

6. **Don't put them on the spot. They need time to process thoughts.** Veronica says, "I still do not like to be asked to say a few words two minutes before a meeting when I haven't had the time to sit and digest what to say. If I don't know the answer to a question I'm being asked, I just let them know I will look into it and keep them posted instead of trying to answer and digging myself in a hole deeper and deeper."

When we know what makes introverts tick, we can create conditions that allow them to do their best work. My suggestion for introverts: It's okay to push yourself to do things that make you uncomfortable. This is normal. There is no growth without at least a little discomfort. By the way, the same is true for extroverts: The key is to hone your skills without coming across as inauthentic and losing sight of who you essentially are. Be the best you you can be

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