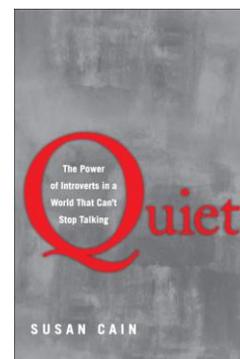


Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking

By Susan Cain



Did you know that at least one in three people are introverts?

If this statistic surprises you, it's because so many introverts do such a great job of covering it up. Wherever we go, closeted introverts pass us undetected on our playgrounds, in our high school locker rooms, and in the boardrooms of corporate America. Indeed, over time, some introverts manage to fool even themselves into believing that they're actually extroverted by nature, until an unexpected life event, such as a layoff, jolts them back into their true selves.

According to Susan Cain, the bestselling author of Quiet: The Power of Introverts in the World that Can't Stop Talking, it makes perfect sense that introverts are prone to hiding, sometimes even from themselves. Over the last several decades, America has steadily adopted a new value system based on a system of beliefs that Cain calls the "Extrovert Ideal." This is the current cultural norm that the ideal self is gregarious, alpha, and comfortable in the spotlight.

Interestingly enough, Americans like to think that we value individuality. But too often, says Cain, we admire one type of individual: the kind who's comfortable "putting oneself out there."

Today across America, introversion has somehow emerged as a second-class personality trait; something to be ashamed of, rather than admired. But if Susan Cain has her way, things may be about to change. In her book, Cain – herself an admitted introvert – highlights countless positive characteristics of quiet people, many of which are too often overlooked. These include (but are by no means limited to), a greater propensity for listening carefully, for focusing deeply on problems, and for identifying details, subtle trends and hidden subtexts. In this way, Cain's book may prove a revelation for them and everyone who lives, works or interacts with introverts.

Many experts believe that the single most important aspect of our personality is where we fall on the introvert-extrovert spectrum. Our place on this continuum influences our choice of friends and mates, and how we make conversation, resolve differences, and even how we show love. It affects the careers we choose and whether or not we succeed at them. It governs how likely we are to exercise, commit adultery, function well without sleep, learn from our mistakes, place big bets in the stock market, delay gratification, be a good leader, and ask "what if"-type questions.

Yet today, Cain argues we make little room for a range of personality styles at work, and in society at large. We're told that "be great is to be bold." We tend to see ourselves as an entire nation of extroverts. But in Cain's view, this means we've lost sight of who we really are.

To be sure, extroversion is an enormously appealing personality style, but Cain believes we've gone too far by turning it into an oppressive standard to which most of us feel we must conform. This is a grave mistake, she says, because so many of our greatest ideas and inventions – from the theory of evolution, to van Gogh's sunflowers, to the personal computer – came from quiet, cerebral people who knew how to mine their inner worlds and the treasures to be found there.

Yet, as we will read in the summary that follows, many of the most important institutions of contemporary life are designed for those who enjoy group projects and high levels of stimulation. Our children find their classroom desks are increasingly arranged in pods; the better to foster group learning. Today, our kids watch TV shows whose protagonists are not mild-mannered "children next door" like the Cindy Brady or Beaver Cleaver-types of yesteryear, but wannabe rock stars with outsized personalities, like Hannah Montana. Meanwhile, us adults work for organizations that insist we work in teams, and live in offices without walls. We end up reporting to supervisors who value our "people skills" above all. And to advance our careers, we're expected to promote ourselves unabashedly, talking as loudly as we can to be heard.

Susan Cain thoroughly debunks these and other ideas by drawing on cutting-edge research in psychology and neuroscience, as well as on her own personal experiences as an introvert. Her two goals in busting these myths are simple: (1) to permanently change the way we, her readers, see introverts; and (2), just as importantly, to change how introverts see themselves.

Defining Introversion and Extroversion

Before we wade any further into Cain's arguments, let's take a moment to consider what she means by the terms *introversion* and *extroversion*, because these common words are often misunderstood by laypersons. For example, in describing introverts, Cain is quick to point out that they may not be loud by nature, but they're not necessarily shy. Cain defines shyness as "a fear of social disapproval or humiliation," while introversion is merely a preference for environments that are not over-stimulating. The world is full of non-shy introverts, like Bill Gates. By all accounts, Gates likes to keep to himself, but he's perfectly comfortable speaking in front of large audiences, and seems to be unfazed by the opinions of others. Consequently, because not all introverts are shy, it's not always possible to spot one at first glance.

Although the idea of multiple personality types dates back to the writings of the ancient Greeks, the clinical terms *introversion* and *extroversion* were first popularized in 1921 by the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung through his influential book, Psychological Types. Jung theorized that introversion and extroversion were *the* central building blocks of personality, above all others. According to Jung's theory, which still stands largely intact to this day, introverts are more drawn to the inner world of thought and feeling, whereas extroverts are focused on the external life of people and activities. Introverts prefer to take time to make meaning out of events swirling around them, and thus may come across as more cautious. Extroverts, on the

other hand, dive right in to new situations. Introverts prefer to recharge their batteries by being alone; extroverts need to recharge when they don't socialize enough. If you've ever taken a Myers-Briggs personality test, which is based on Jung's thinking and used widely by colleges, government agencies and Fortune 100 companies, then you may already be familiar with these ideas.

Many psychologists would also agree that introverts and extroverts work differently. Extroverts tend to tackle assignments more quickly. They make fast (sometimes rash) decisions, and are comfortable multitasking and risk-taking. Introverts, by contrast, often work more slowly and deliberately. They like to focus on one task at a time and have better powers of concentration.

Extroverts think out loud and on their feet. They prefer talking to listening, rarely find themselves at a loss for words, and occasionally blurt out things they never meant to say. On the flip side, introverts prefer to devote their social energies to close friends, colleagues, and family. They listen more than they talk, think before they speak, and often feel as if they express themselves better in writing than in conversation. Thus, introverts tend to be drawn to social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) more so than extroverts who favor face-to-face interactions.

It's also worth noting that introverts are just as smart as extroverts, although in today's extrovert-dominated schools and workplaces, they may struggle to be heard. This is not a good thing, says Cain. "If we assume – as we should – that quiet and loud people have roughly the same number of good ideas, then we should worry if the louder and more forceful people always carry the day," she writes. "Yet studies in group dynamics suggest that this is exactly what happens."

According to the author, most of us tend to perceive loud talkers as smarter than quiet types, even though reams of SAT and intelligence test data reveal this perception to be inaccurate. In one experiment in which two strangers met over the phone, those who spoke more were considered more intelligent, better looking, and more likable. We also tend to see talkers as leaders. The more a person talks, the more other group members direct their attention to him or her, which means that he becomes increasingly powerful as a meeting goes on. It also helps to speak fast; we rate quick talkers as more capable than slow talkers. Of course, all of this would be perfectly fine if more talking were correlated with greater insight, but there's no such link.

The point here is that, on average, introverts and extroverts have equal cognitive abilities, but they are often not perceived as such. This finding, of course, has huge implications for organizations of all types. The question becomes, "are we fully valuing the contributions made by our more soft-spoken introverted colleagues to the same extent as the louder, more gregarious ones?"

Finding Strength in Introversion

In today's workplace, because introverts often find themselves pushed aside by their more extroverted colleagues (i.e. talked over, forgotten about in meetings, etc.), it would be easy to think of introverts as somehow weaker or softer than extroverts. But, depending on how you look at it, the opposite may actually be true. Indeed, introverts often have great inner strength.

Studies have shown that extroverts tend to be more reward-sensitive than introverts. And reward-sensitive people are highly motivated to seek external validation, such as a promotion at work, or a big jackpot at the casino. Reward sensitivity motivates us to pursue goals like sex and money, social status and influence. It prompts us to climb ladders and reach for faraway branches in order to gather life's juiciest fruits. But sometimes we're too sensitive to rewards, and according to Cain, this is a key weakness of extroversion. Reward sensitivity on overdrive gets people into all kinds of trouble. We can get so excited by the prospect of juicy prizes, like winning big in the stock market, that we take outsized risks and ignore obvious warning signals.

Introverts are far more likely to pay attention to their inner warning signals. They're generally more successful at regulating their desires for excitement, and curbing their more destructive appetites. Can extroverts also maintain high levels of self-control? Absolutely, but they certainly have to work much harder at it. In fact, some experts believe that hyper reward-sensitivity is not only an interesting side-effect of extroversion; it is actually what makes an extrovert an extrovert. Extroverts, in other words, are characterized by their tendency to seek rewards, from top dog status at work, to sexual highs, to big winnings at the casino. They tend to have far greater hedonistic ambitions than introverts, and while many extroverts have successfully learned to contain their urges, it remains a constant struggle for them.

Why would this be the case? Cain cites groundbreaking neuroscience research that shows extroverts' dopamine pathways appear to be more active than those of introverts. In other words, the "pleasure centers" of extroverts' brains, which are fuelled by dopamine, may be more finely-tuned. One particular study found that extroverts who win at poker games have more activity in the reward-sensitive regions of their brains than victorious introverts do. Still other research has shown that the medial orbito-frontal cortex, a key component of the brain's dopamine-driven reward system, is physically larger in extroverts than in introverts.

By contrast, introverts "have a smaller response to rewards" writes Cain, "and so go less out of their way to seek reward cues. Introverts will, like anyone, be drawn from time to time to sex, and parties, and status, but the kick they get will be relatively small, so they are not going to break a leg to get there." In short, according to Cain, introverts just don't buzz as easily.

This relative blindness to danger may explain why extroverts are more likely than introverts to be killed while driving, be hospitalized as a result of accident or injury, smoke, have risky sex, participate in high-risk sports, have affairs, and remarry. These are truly sobering statistics!

All that said, Cain is quick to remind us that her goal isn't to denigrate those who prefer to forge ahead quickly and take risks; nor is it to glorify people who tend to be more careful. Her point is that organizational leaders should consciously work to find a balance between the two – between action and reflection. For example, if you were staffing an investment bank, you'd ideally want to hire not only reward-sensitive types (i.e. those who are likely to profit from bull markets), but also those who are emotionally more calm and neutral. You'd want to make sure that key corporate decisions reflect the input of both kinds of people, not just one type.

Introverts as Leaders

It's also a myth that extroverts make better leaders. This is a myth that Cain is happy to bust.

What do introverted leaders do differently from – and sometimes better than – extroverts? Well, it depends on the situation. According to Wharton management professor Adam Grant, who has spent considerable time working with Fortune 500 executives and the military, extroverted leaders are generally better at enhancing group performance when employees are unmotivated and passive. But introverted leaders are more effective with engaged, proactive employees.

In one study, Professor Grant analyzed data from one of the largest restaurant chains in the U.S. He discovered that the profits of the stores managed by extroverts were 16 percent higher than the profits of those led by introverts. But upon closer inspection, this was only the case when the employees were passive types who tended to do their job without exercising initiative. Introverted leaders had the exact opposite results. When they worked with employees who actively tried to improve work procedures, their stores outperformed those led by extroverts by 14 percent. Why did this occur? Grant argues it makes sense that introverts are uniquely good at leading initiative-takers. Because of their inclination to listen to others, and their lack of interest in dominating the room, introverts are more likely to hear and implement suggestions. Having benefited from the talents of their followers, they are then likely to motivate them to be even more proactive.

Extroverted leaders, on the other hand, can be so intent on putting their own stamp on things that they risk losing others' good ideas along the way. This raises an interesting question for organizations: are there circumstances in which, all things being equal, that it would be better to hire an introvert for a supervisory role? The answer is yes. If employees are *already* highly motivated and engaged in their work, an introvert might be better suited to capitalize on that.

Introverts as Innovators

In one particularly controversial chapter, Cain hypothesizes that, in addition to being superior leaders in certain situations, introverts are also better at inventing new products and services.

In making her point, Cain points to examples of many of the greatest innovators of the last century, including Steve Wozniak of Apple, all of whom just happen to be introverts.

In Wozniak's fascinating memoir, *iWoz*, the Apple co-founder offers this advice to kids who aspire to great creativity: "Most inventors and engineers I've met are like me – they're kind of shy and they live inside their heads. And in fact, the very best of them are artists. And artists work best alone 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 been invented by committee. If you're that rare engineer who's an inventor and also an artist, I'm going to give you some advice that might be hard to take: Work alone, not on a team."

Many studies – including research done at the University of California, Berkeley – have confirmed that the most creative people tend to be social introverts. They may be interpersonally

skilled but “not of an especially sociable or participative temperament.” They prefer to be independent and individualistic, and generally loathe the idea of working in teams.

It’s hard to say for sure why introverts are generally more creative than extroverts. But Cain is attracted to one surprisingly powerful potential explanation for introverts’ creative advantage. And if she’s right, it’s certainly an explanation that all of us can learn from. Cain believes that introverts prefer to work independently because solitude is actually a catalyst for innovation.

If this is true (i.e., if solitude really is an important key to creativity), then America is headed down the wrong path if we truly aspire to be a nation of innovators. If it were true, then we’d want to teach our kids to work independently at school. And we’d want to give employees plenty of privacy and autonomy in the workplace. Yet, increasingly we do just the opposite.

The way we organize many of our most important institutions – our schools and our workplaces – puts a premium on openness and collaboration at every single opportunity. Indeed, a growing social and intellectual phenomenon that Cain derisively labels “The New Groupthink” has elevated teamwork above all else. The New Groupthink, which has many powerful advocates, including the prominent writer Malcolm Gladwell, insists that creativity and intellectual achievement come from a gregarious place, as opposed to toiling away on a problem in solitude. “Innovation, the heart of the knowledge economy, is fundamentally social,” he writes.

Somehow or other, these ideals have slowly crept into our sub-consciousness without much public debate or scrutiny. According to Cain, this occurred because the New Groupthink did not arise at one precise moment. Co-operative learning, corporate teamwork, and open office plans emerged at different times and for different reasons. But the mighty force that pulled these trends together was the rise of the Internet, which, in Cain’s words: “lent both cool and gravitas to the idea of collaboration.” On the Internet, wondrous creations were produced via shared brainpower, such as Linux, the open-source operating system, and the ever-popular Wikipedia.

Cain believes that these and other online creations, which are exponentially greater than the sum of their parts, are so awe-inspiring that we have come to revere the miracle of the hive mind of crowd-sourcing. Collaboration is now a sacred concept, a key ingredient for success.

That’s why, when people talk about aspects of the New Groupthink such as open office plans, they tend to invoke the Internet. “Employees are putting their whole lives up on Facebook and Twitter and everywhere else anyway,” said Dan Lafontaine, the CFO of the social marketing firm Mr. Youth, in an interview with NPR. “There’s no reason they should hide behind a cubicle wall.”

But Cain is quick to point out the flaw in such arguments. The earliest open-source creators didn’t share office space, she notes. Indeed, often they didn’t even live in the same country. Their collaborations took place in the digital realm of the Internet. And in Cain’s view, this is not an insignificant detail. “If you had gathered the same people who created Linux, installed them in a giant conference room for a year, and asked them to devise a new operating system, it’s doubtful that anything so revolutionary would have occurred,” she writes. Interesting point.

Many introverts seem to know these things instinctively, and resist being herded together. Backbone Entertainment, a video game design company in Oakland, initially used an open office plan but found that their game developers, many of whom were introverts, were unhappy. It seemed that this group of high-skilled knowledge workers was quite happy to collaborate with each other online, but when it came to physical interaction, they preferred to be left alone.

Notwithstanding these sorts of examples, though, it's common for anyone who spends time in corporate America to find him or herself drawn into group brainstorming sessions as a means of spurring group creativity. Or, as Cain puts it, "cooped up with colleagues in a room full of whiteboards, markers, and a preternaturally peppy facilitator encouraging everyone to free-associate." Unfortunately, says Cain, there's only one problem with this model: group brainstorming doesn't actually work. At least, it doesn't work if *creativity* is the objective in mind.

To make her point, Cain cites some forty years of research that shows how creative performance actually gets worse as group size increases: groups of nine generate fewer and poorer ideas compared to groups of six, which do worse than groups of four. The "evidence from science suggests that business people must be insane to use brainstorming groups," writes the organizational psychologist Adrian Furnham. "If you have talented and motivated people, they should be encouraged to work alone when creativity is actually the highest priority." Or at the very least, large brainstorming sessions should be used more sparingly by managers.

An interesting exception to this rule is online brainstorming. Research shows that group brainstorming, when done electronically, can be very productive in terms of fostering creativity. And unlike in the physical world, the larger the online brainstorming group, the better it performs. The same is true of academic research, explains Cain. Professors who work together electronically, from different physical locations, tend to produce research that is more influential than those either working alone or collaborating face-to-face. Perhaps this is because participating in an online working group is actually a form of solitude all its own.

Indeed, after all these years of evidence that conventional brainstorming groups don't work, they remain as popular as ever. Participants in brainstorming sessions usually believe that their group performed much better than it actually did. This points to a valuable reason for their continued popularity: group brainstorming makes people feel attached. A worthy goal, says Cain, so long as we understand that social glue, as opposed to creativity, is the principal benefit.

In the author's view, the way forward for corporate America is not to stop collaborating face-to-face, but to refine the way we do it. Of course our schools and workplaces should continue to teach us the skills to work with others. Co-operative learning can be effective when practiced well and in moderation. But at the same time, she argues we also need to do a better job of fostering environments in which people are free to disappear into their private workspaces when they want to focus or simply be alone. It's vital for us to recognize that many people – especially introverts like Steve Wozniak – need extra quiet in order to do their best work.

Caring for your Inner Introvert

If you're one of the 33% of Americans who lean more towards introversion, Cain has some advice for you. Once you understand and appreciate that introversion is a big part of your

personality that's likely there to stay, you can begin consciously trying to situate yourself in environments favorable to your natural disposition. This means looking for workplace and social environments that are neither over-stimulating nor under-stimulating for you. You can organize your life in terms of what personality psychologists call "optimal levels of arousal," or what Susan Cain calls "sweet spots." By doing so you'll feel more energetic and alive than before.

If you follow her lead, you can set up your work, hobbies, and social life so that you spend as much time inside your sweet spot as possible. People who are aware of their sweet spots have the power to leave jobs that exhaust them and start new and satisfying businesses, she says.

Conclusion

We know from watching young children play that there are many different types of people born into this world. One child might prefer to run around the universe of her yard, wielding a light saber and engaging in mock battles with her friends. Whereas another child might like to sit quietly at his desk and draw pictures, preferring to engage less often and less gregariously with others his age. In our kids, we respect and value these differences. But too often, as children age and eventually enter the workforce, there's suddenly no longer any room for introversion.

The key challenge for organizations today, according to Susan Cain, is not to try to change people, but rather to make better use of the unique talents and attributes of every employee. "Introverts," she writes, "have been offered keys to private gardens full of riches." These, of course, are gardens of remarkable creativity and tremendous inner strength, buried deep inside.

Therein lays the true power of introverts.