

Introverted Holidays: The 3rd Alternative Quest

By Sylvia Löhken



December marks the beginning of the most stressful time of the year for many of us. Christmas parties, gift-giving hustle and bustle: it's a real undertaking, and not just for introverts. How to enjoy the pre-Christmas period and the holidays anyway? Find 3. alternatives! How to do it? Intro expert Sylvia C. Löhken and synergy guru Stephen R. Covey show you how. In our four-part Synergy series, you'll learn how introverts and extroverts can work together to develop ideas that are a win-win for everyone:

Tips from Sylvia C. Löhken

1. use your active brain to think about interesting new solutions. Who, if not you?
2. think about who could help you. Having creative ideas is great. To implement those ideas, approach the right people to take it on.
3. First and foremost, at the Christmas party location, find out where you could take a short break in between.

Tips from Stephen R. Covey

1. The key to the 3rd alternative is that you value differences. Whether you're an introvert or an extrovert: Learn from each other. Bring your respective strengths together. Surprisingly creative solutions are then possible.
2. approach others openly: say truthfully when you are not comfortable with a situation. Ask your counterpart, "Are you willing to find a solution that is a win-win for both of us?"

3. Don't settle for unwanted compromises. Compromise usually has a stale aftertaste. Use compromise suggestions as a springboard for new, better solutions.

Overview

Part 1	The Jingle Bells Project: A Christmas party of the third kind
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Part 1

The Jingle Bells Project. A Christmas party of the third kind

Executive floor

"Sure, I'm in!" Isabell sighs inwardly. The slippery slide towards the end of the year is spiked with sudden additional tasks. But when the CEO himself asks her to take care of the finance department's Christmas party at short notice, there is no escape. And she understands that with the current gaps in the teams, the human resources department has no capacity for Jingle Bells projects right now. It's a good sign that Erik, as head of the controlling department, trusts her to organize a party for 30 people. As an extrovert, maybe he thinks that the numerous introverts in the department only want tea and biscuits and then their peace and quiet anyway?

No, the party can't be like that. Isabelle's thoughts are dancing. She frowns. Then she smiles at Erik. "But only if we can schedule you as a surprise on 9 December," she adds. "Count me in. Surprises: always welcome!"

Two hours later. Cafeteria

Isabell is having lunch with her favorite colleague Edith from marketing and tells her about her new project. "Well, congratulations, Isabell – Jingle Bells! Clearly a favorite job for an introvert, isn't it? Well, you'll be super visible if things work out for you. What do you have in mind? Erik loves lots of fun and lots of people. And he wants to be seen. The extroverts in your department would like that, too. But I'm sure your department introverts feel it's a huge sacrifice to get to the party site and not near their sofas."

Isabell nods. "Yes, this is not easy, I want it to be nice for everyone. Maybe it's about including everyone's needs, not going for any weird compromises." "This will take time. You know what? Why don't you get a team for ideas and organization?" "How could that possibly work, Edith? Everyone is up to their eyeballs here right now, with the workload and these gaps in the teams." Edith beams. "Ask your marketing woman right here! Just find those who might feel like being a bit more visible. And who don't have so much to do. They can then develop something that doesn't simply cater to either the party animals or to the tea-and-cookie fraction! Why don't you take... hey, how about some trainees?"

Isabell thinks for a moment. "How about a mixed team? In the last twelve months, four of our colleagues have retired. Maybe I could invite them to plan together with the trainees? They are old hands, they know the people and the company..."

Edith thinks practically and in incentives. "Why would they do that?" "They are attached to the company. And they have a role. They will be active and not just invited guests. And the trainees: I can immediately think of a few who like to organize. I'm sure I can find a bonus pot for an extra project. The Jingle Bells project! Also an incentive, isn't it?" Edith nods, all marketing. "Try it. And then let them go on their own!"

9 December. In front of a hangar

Erik arrives around 7 pm at the old hangar, a place that has not been used for a long time. Not really cozy but surely interesting! He still doesn't know what to do. But hey – surprise! And Erik has his dress code standards, warming his ears with an original Finnish Christmas elf pointed hat.

At the entrance, the first person he sees is Martin Meier (head of the tax section until a few months ago). He is chatting with Zoe, a trainee. When they see Erik, they smile at each other. Then they approach him. "Hi Erik! Welcome! We're here to brief you a bit. We thought now would be a good time." "Briefing? What's happening?"

Martin clears his throat. "Well, we sat down together: three fresh retirees, three trainees and Anna, the intern from PR. And then we thought about what we wanted from a Christmas party..." Erik nods. "I prepared a little speech to be on the safe side. My speech happens every year, anyway."

"Well," Zoe chimes in carefully. After all, it's not every day you get to talk to the boss himself. "So we've been thinking in the project team about how we can create a Christmas party that

appeals to different persons. And that might also be special – interesting." "That really took time!" smiles Martin. "But we listened to each other, and then we set common goals, and then we came up with ideas... We alumni did know a thing or two, of course."

"Sounds really entrepreneurial!" Erik nods appreciatively. Wow, he thinks, this is how junior staff grow up. And they have mentors, too!

Martin pulls an index card out of his tweed jacket. "Anna and the trainees have already created a small review of the year: four large posters with speech bubbles, photo collages, drawings... It's all up on the walls inside, there's enough space, we also have cozy conversation corners. And the Christmas decoration with catering: Well, you'll see... About your role, Erik: We would like to do a little interview with you. There are a few questions about how some things went last year from your point of view. And we would like to moderate audience questions. You will be thrown up against the wall in all your beauty; we have a good screen. Then we'll have an online poll on the highlights and the fails of the year. And then..." "Well? Well?"

"Then we'll hopefully hear a Christmas song from you. You play the clarinet. How about *Jingle Bells*? Martin shrugs. "I don't have the clarinet with me." "No problem. Your wife brought them to the office in time." Zoe laughs. "And she's already excited to see how you will be doing here. She's standing with Isabell right now. Anyway, without Isabell, none of this would be happening. She's great! "Are you ready?" asks Martin.

Erik smiles and nods. He hears snatches of conversation and laughter from inside.

Later, still outside the hangar

Isabell takes a quiet moment outside the door. She hears a clarinet playing the final bars of *Jingle Bells*. Applause. Happy laughter. Something has come up today. Isabell doesn't know what it is yet - but it does feel good.

Part 2

Where will we celebrate? The 3rd alternative between challenges and new traditions



In front of the screen

Enno's fast movements are delayed on Zoom like a slow-motion interlude. Also, the Atlantic Ocean lies between Isabell and her brother. But even from a distance and in digital space, Enno once again easily manages to put her under stress.

"So, Lynn and I are coming to Germany with the kids. This is mum's first Christmas without dad. She should have all of us around her. And she should be able to relax. She does deserve that!"

Isabell nods, hesitating. After a long day at work full of meetings and talks, she feels a huge wave of American energy rolling towards her and her family. Enno, who always takes what he wants for granted. The ever-talking sister-in-law. Dina and Elon, seven- and ten-year-old powerhouses who never ever get tired. But yes, it is their family, and it will help Mama Marlene, in this year of mourning, to have Enno with his wife and grandchildren around, in addition to Isabell's small family with Hannes and eight-year-old Sophie.

"And if you move a little closer together, we'll also fit into your flat. Dina and Elon can sleep with Sophie, and we'll just occupy your living room." Isabell swallows. "Let me think about it. I'll be in touch, Enno!" "Always the procrastinator. It's only for a few days. We're leaving on New Year's Eve, great party in Munich coming up. See you!"

Isabell puts her aching head in her hands for a moment. Mum should be able to relax, says Enno. Oh, relaxation – what a cool thing to live! But probably not for her.

Marlene' house

"Now, Mum - do you have any ideas about what Christmas might look like this year?" Marlene looks at Isabell thoughtfully. "Everything is different this year," she replies. "I've already thought about this." She takes a sip of coffee. "The most precious thing for me is that you are all here – you, Hannes, Sophie and also Enno with Lynn, Dina and Elon. They will come all the way from Boston." Isabell nods. "And we also have an opportunity now. It will never be like last year any more. 2022 wasn't easy for any of us. Let me ask you back: What do *you* wish for? And what do Hannes and Sophie say?"

Isabell is surprised. "What do you mean?" "Well, it's not just about Christmas Eve. When your brother and his family come from the US and live with you for a week: I can imagine what that would do to you, daughter dear!"

"Mum..." "No, wait, you asked for ideas. True, I do not feel exactly strong as an ox right now. But I do have one thing: space. Lots of space. And time. Maybe too much of it. Let's take our time and think about how we can make this a nice family reunion. I mean, we should celebrate in a way that makes us all feel good!" Marlene grins. "Enno has always taken good care of himself, even as a child. He's allowed to. And I have two children with their families. It's so nice that you will all be here!"

The two women move a little closer together. Isabell grabs her notebook. There is more coffee. And the conversation goes on quite differently from what Isabell had previously imagined in her ever-active brain. Wow, Mum, it's not about gritting my teeth any more, she thinks. We're talking about something new. And I feel better already...

Marlene's house, Christmas Eve

A howl of triumph comes from the upper floor. Dina has just discovered Sophie in her hiding place. It sounds like the whole thing is about to turn into a pillow fight. The adults are still sitting at the table. In front of them are the remains of the huge quantities of pizza that Enno and Hannes have prepared in Marlene's kitchen. "Sophie seems to be fine with the fact that we're not doing the presents until tomorrow," Marlene smiles and takes a sip of the Italian red wine that Isabell got. Perfect for the pizza!

"And Dina and Elon and Sophie have a room together! It's so nice of you to let us stay here!" beams Lynn. She can't get enough of the 2-metre spruce tree that Isabell and Marlene have decorated with traditional family ornaments. Gifts are piled up under the tree. For tomorrow.

Three large Christmas stockings in green and red gold are hanging from the banister, with the children's names on them. Marlene, Enno and Lynn will later fill them with small presents after Hannes and Isabell have gone home. Marlene smiles. It is quite a hustle and bustle. However, Hannes and Enno have done all the shopping, everyone helps with cleaning up, and tomorrow Lynn and Isabell will be in the kitchen

to prepare a big Christmas turkey. Marlene does remain responsible for all the sweet Christmas treats. Cookies and cakes are her territory – a matter of honour! The huge colourful plate on the sideboard, like the ornaments in the tree, is her children's reminder of all the Christmas Eves they celebrated with her and their father. Marlene feels tears welling up inside her. But they are grateful, not bitter.

Enno sits down at the piano and reaches into the keys. "Joy to the World". Handel with English lyrics. Isabell comes through the front door after her little walk through the familiar streets. She hums along softly.

3 tips for introverts

1. Give yourself space. Ask yourself what you personally want from Christmas .
2. Respect your needs. It does not help anyone if you end up under the Christmas tree with your last ounce of strength – or if everyone has to submit to a tradition.
3. Distribute the various tasks around the celebration so that everyone has something to do – ideally something they like or can handle well.

Part 3

Bang! New Year's Eve.



Marlene's kitchen

Crankily, Enno takes a smell at his herbal tea. He had to stay with his mother Marlene with his severe cold while Lynn is visiting an old friend in Munich with the children. In a few days, they will all be going back to the USA. At least his sister

Isabell came to visit for New Year's Eve. And hey, maybe a few things can be cleared up right now.

"You know very well that Mama needs us more than before! And I'm in Boston right now. I need another year or two for my next career step. But you – you're here, Isabell. And nothing is really happening in your job anyway. Why don't you go part-time for a while? It's paradise here for employees, isn't it – you get it right away when you want to take care of a family member. Just if you care to ask, of course!" Isabell gets hot and cold. Fragments of thoughts dance in her head: *Like always. Always interfering. No question about me. If I don't say anything, he always adds pressure. What a stress. And his career is untouchable, of course. Egoist. Go away. Yes, good thing he'll be gone soon!*

Enno's cold, mixed with self-pity (that lovely party in Munich!), lets his mood fall to a low point: *his soft-spoken sister! Has a loser job and could be much more useful here if she worked part-time. Mum has priority now. Isabell is just selfish. It's not about her right now. She has to see that!*

"Say something. You are so passive-aggressive! This isn't about your cosy corner, it's about mum. She's all alone!" Enno's voice croaks noticeably louder.

"Say, what's going on here?" Suddenly Marlene is standing in the kitchen, frowning. "I feel like I've just been beamed back twenty years. When you came out of school ..." Isabell stands up and puts her arm around her mother. "It's all good, Mum. We are, erm, just discussing something." "Yes, that was easy to hear! And it's obviously about me. Allow me to speak up here. I may be a widow now, but I did not suddenly morph into a toddler!" Marlene gets a cup and sits down at the kitchen table. "Is that herbal tea? No, thank you. I'll put on some coffee."

A little later

"Now," Marlene starts, looking at her son. "Now tell us what you want. We are listening." "That's obvious, Mum! You're lonely without Dad. And you need help. And you have a family. And we're discussing..." "Enno, what do *you* want?" Marlene persists. "I want you to be all right!" "*You*, Enno." "But I am in the US. I can't do anything from there. And Isabell could..." "Wait a minute." Marlene looks at her daughter. "And you, Isabell?" Enno scowls at his lukewarm tea. "I want you to be well, too. And right now things are looking good at work. And I can't just..." No, Isabell, what do you want?" I want some new perspectives. My boss just found out that I'm good at organising. And there's a management position opening up soon. But I don't want to be selfish, either. And Enno has it easy, he's gone..."

Marlene leans back and takes a sip of coffee. "It is really sweet that you both care about me. Can you imagine that it just makes me happy to see you like this? With great families, on a good career path in your professions?" Enno takes a breath but is silent as his mother shakes her head. "I am so proud of you!" Marlene continues. "Now let's think about what we need so you can do your thing worry-free. Ok?"

January 2023: Snapshot

Enno and Lynn are back in Boston with the kids. Sunday mornings are grandma time: Zoom sessions with Marlene. The highlight: Harry, the little mongrel dog from the animal shelter, who licks the screen from time to time.

Isabell and Hanno join in from time to time, along with their daughter Sophie. Sophie often visits her grandma Marlene after school. Grammy can not only bake a great pizza, but also gratefully accepts her help to look after Harry.

Isabell has just accepted her promotion in the annual review.

Marlene is thinking of starting a book club with her friends. With the dog-friendly friends.

3 tips for introverts

1. Stop as soon as you notice that you are annoyed with your counterpart – or that you are withdrawing. What would you prefer to be different?
2. Try to find out what your counterpart's perspective looks like. If in doubt, ask. Just like Marlene, you can also encourage this in others.
3. Put both perspectives side by side. Ask yourself and your communication partner: How can you consider both needs?

Part 4: The 3. Alternative for Quiet Persons: An Instruction Manual



It's your turn now!

In the first three parts of this series, introverted Isabell manages to make the end of the year intro-friendly with the help of the 3rd alternative – both professionally and within the family. This final part is a guide for you, dear reader, so that you are able to create new paths for yourself in the new year. For this purpose, I briefly describe the four parameters of the 3rd alternative.

And we have an occasion, too: Isabell, newly promoted, is looking for ways to design meetings with her team in a way that works for both extroverts *and* introverts.

Part 1: I see myself.

The first step is about finding firm ground for everything else: What do I need to feel good about myself? And what doesn't fit for me?

Isabell says about meetings: "They are exhausting. Every speaking slot has to be conquered, because extroverted participants are talking all the time. And when it's finally my turn, I am often interrupted. This is so impolite!" Isabell suspects that this is why many introverts give up participating in general. At the beginning of the change process, she has all team members take an anonymous test: Are they introverted, extroverted or centroverted? (Click here for the test: [***LINK***](#))

Part 2: I see you.

The second step is about hearing the other side – without any judgements or justifications. This part is easy to do for many introverts: They are usually great listeners. The non-judging part is more difficult: It means to give the needs and perspectives of the other person the same space we give ourselves. (Note to some intros: the same space, not more space!).

Isabell lets the extroverts in the team have their say: anonymously in a digital vote, so that everyone feels safe with the new supervisor. And she hears their view of the meetings: "Mostly rather boring." "If I don't do something myself, nothing happens!" "It's also an opportunity to talk to each other!"

Part 3: I seek you out.

It is exciting that people perceive and evaluate the same situation quite differently. This diversity of perspectives becomes an asset when it becomes the starting point for solutions that everyone really feels comfortable with.

In a special meeting, Isabell lets both introverts and extroverts talk about their perspectives on meetings. She shows the results of the anonymous votes. And she explains the differences in personality types and shows what they need to feel comfortable.

Part 4: I synergize with you.

In the fourth step, new solutions emerge: with each other, not against each other. By making all needs clear and respecting them, everyone can live well with the outcome. There are methods for this that Stephen R. Covey suggests:

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/embracing-3rd-alternative-my-way-your-our-new-better-frank/>

In Isabell's team, members agree on these seven rules:

1. There is a moderator for each meeting. The responsibility rotates – all participants take turns.
2. There is an agenda for each meeting and a responsible person for each item.
3. All meetings are limited to 60 minutes. They start and end on time. The last five minutes are spent summarizing: What is still open? What are the next steps?
4. Speeches may last a maximum of two minutes. An hourglass is placed on the table for all to see. In digital meetings, a timer is used. Anyone who is over two minutes can expect a knock on the table or a flashing of the video screens.
- 5 Recording results in the meeting also rotates. In addition to the content points, the file on the intranet also contains the participants, the tasks and the timetable: Who does what by when?
6. From now on, the team will try new methods during meetings: for example, tandem or mini-group phases, polls, short writing phases and visualizations.
7. Everyone commits to dealing with each other fairly. No interruptions, direct or indirect attacks and degrading comments.

Isabell's team goes into the new year with these points in mind. Everyone has a good feeling: Some enjoy the added structure with its safety, others are looking forward to more variety. And the whole team hopes that the time of hour-long debates is over for good and that something new will replace the old rituals: a really productive synergy pool. Last but not least, Isabell appreciates the perspective with everyone being active in the meetings. She is only moderately fond of moderating and enjoys the relief.

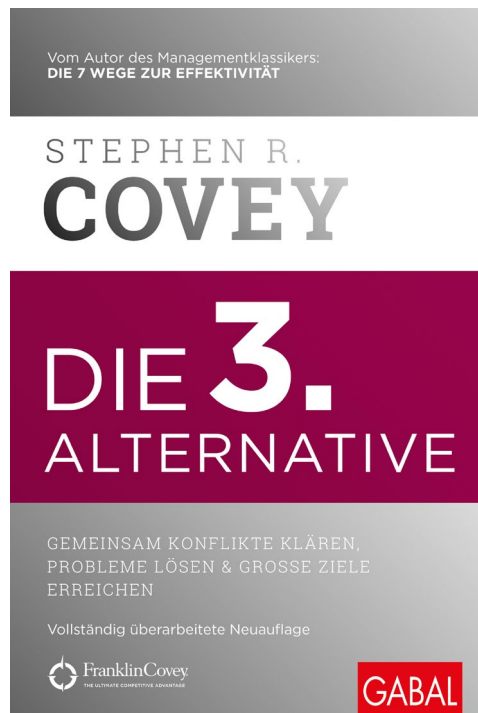
Dear readers, it was an honor and a pleasure to show how introverts can take good care of themselves with the ideas of a great thinker like Stephen R. Covey. And now it's your turn. Take good care of yourself in this sparkling new year – and synergize!

My very best regards, Sylvia Löhken

Are you an introvert, extrovert, or centrovert? Find out here:

<https://www.intros-extros.com/en/introverts-extroverts/online-test>

Stephen R. Covey
The 3rd Alternative



Sylvia Löhken
Quiet People, Powerful Words



Dr Sylvia Loehken is a highly in-demand coach and speaker who specializes in how introverts and extroverts can work together. She has a PhD in linguistics and communication, and is a qualified coach. She works with many of Europe's leading companies and institutions such as Berlin Regional Bank, Vienna University of Economics and Business, and University of Hamburg.

Dr. Sylvia Löhken encourages people to pursue their goals their own way. She understands the characteristics of introversion and extroversion as a diversity topic that brings very concrete results: more ease in personal performance, better cooperation - and more quality of life. Sylvia's clients include large corporations as well as small and medium-sized companies, international organizations and professional associations.

Sylvia's books have been translated into 30 languages and sold over 500,000 copies. She is author of the books "Quiet Person – Happy Life" (2017), "Quiet Impact"(2013) and "The Power of Personality" (2015). With these international bestsellers, Sylvia is often consulted as an expert in personalized communication. Leading media such as Die Zeit, Der Spiegel, Psychologies, El País and Madame Figaro published articles and features about her work; many print media interviewed her about intro- and extroverted life and work. In addition, Sylvia is often featured on radio or television.

Together with Pink University, she developed the video training "Introverted - and successful at work". She is a certified coach as well as Reiss Profile Master, LUXXprofile Master and S.C.I.L. Master. In addition, Sylvia is the author of various texts on academic communication.

Sylvia is Speaker of the Year 2012 and knows how to translate scientific findings into exciting and useful information in clear words. She has a doctorate in linguistics and worked as a science administration manager in Germany and Japan. She was certified as a coach and moderator by the University of Bielefeld.

Sylvia has been coaching and training experts in academia and academic administration for almost 20 years. She accompanied the procedures of the Excellence Initiative from the very beginning as a consultant for applicant clusters, graduate institutions and universities. She is a coach in the preparation for ERC interviews (Starting Grants, Consolidator Grants, Synergy Grants) and helps in the preparation of evaluations and inspections. Her clients in academic communication include national and international universities, research institutes and science organizations.

Stephen Covey was an internationally respected leadership authority, family expert, teacher, organizational consultant, business leader, and author who dedicated his life to teaching principle-centered living and leadership to build both families and organizations. He earned an MBA from Harvard University and a doctorate from Brigham Young University, where he was a professor of organizational behavior and business management and also served as director of university relations and assistant to the president.

Stephen was the author of several acclaimed books, including the international bestseller, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, which was named the #1 Most Influential Business

Book of the Twentieth Century and one of the top-ten most influential management books ever. It has sold more than 50 million copies (print, digital, and audio formats) in more than 40 languages throughout the world.

As a father of nine and grandfather of 55, he received the 2003 Fatherhood Award from the National Fatherhood Initiative, which he said was the most meaningful award he ever received. Other awards given to Stephen include the Thomas More College Medallion for continuing service to humanity, Speaker of the Year in 1999, the Sikh's 1998 International Man of Peace Award, the 1994 International Entrepreneur of the Year Award, and the National Entrepreneur of the Year Lifetime Achievement Award for Entrepreneurial Leadership. Stephen was recognized as one of Time magazine's 25 Most Influential Americans and received numerous honorary doctorate degrees.

Stephen was the cofounder and vice chairman of FranklinCovey, a global organizational performance improvement firm, with offices serving more than 160 countries. The company shares Stephen's vision and passion to enable greatness in people and organizations throughout the world.