

**Sylvia Löhken**

## **Quiet People - High Impact**

**How to make your presence felt and your voice heard**

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## **Introduction**

### **Extroverts and Introverts: two worlds in one**

My name is Sylvia Löhken. I am an introvert communicator. That may sound like an oxymoron. I am not the nerd who barricades herself for days behind her computer and strews pizza crumbs over her keyboard. That image is a cliché. Those nerds represent just one type of quiet people. There are many more of us.

I like to be with people. People are my profession and my vocation, but after a noisy and busy day I need alone time to recharge. My extrovert colleagues are energized by the excitement of working with seminar participants, audiences and coaching clients. I am not.

What makes being an introvert a topic for a book on communications? That was something I must find out. It started like this.

For someone in my profession, participation in training workshops is a matter of course. There came a time, however, when communications training lost its attractiveness to me. The topic wasn't the problem. What happens in the communication between people is one of the things that interest me most.

I was ill at ease with the coaches, my own colleagues. They seemed loud and superficial, and I realized this was a problem I had to solve by myself. So I started to ponder. (Introverts love to ponder all day.) What exactly is it that irritates me when I listen to them?

Those talking to the audience were no better or worse than I whenever I happen to be in the same position, yet nevertheless they were different, so different that their behaviour did not meet my needs. Many labelled themselves as "number 1", "leading", "top whatsoever", which I considered a needless exaggeration.

Additionally, in the training workshops I was usually given advice that just showed me over and over again how very different I was. More sweeping movements, please! Speak up more aggressively, please! Convey your content with more energy, please!

That made me feel uncomfortable. Until now I hadn't associated my personal style with either big sweeping gestures, aggressive negotiating or a manifestation of power. It hadn't done me any harm. To the contrary, the "quiet" clients and seminar participants (those with calm, measured movements, a co-operative approach and less visible emotions) liked my offerings very much.

As I liked them. Most of my customers had a sober-minded and rational way of thinking. "Ah! You prefer the quiet blue brains!", my very extrovert coach said when I described to her my favourite customers. She was right. After my own experiences as seminar participant I enjoyed the focussed work with people who were from a similar mental tribe. Thus I realized, for my favourite customers and myself there was no communications training available specifically tailored to the strengths and needs of quiet people.

The book you are holding in your hands aims to close this huge gap along with seminars, lectures and coaching catering to introvert personalities. Good communication is all about identity, which has been, and still is, my starting point. Not until you know and can handle yourself well will you be able to interact with other people successfully as a presenter, negotiator, net-worker, or even in your personal life.

What is it that characterizes that quiet representative of the human species? Since there wasn't any proper advice for the normal (neither shy nor highly sensitive) "quiet" among us I took to the task of analyzing my own communication habits. Anglophone self-help literature and psychological research provided valuable insights. Furthermore, I started to look at my customers with a new and special curiosity.

The results were exciting: I identified two groups of characteristics defining the introvert's communication pattern, clearly distinguishable as strengths and hurdles. Not all of these characteristics can be found in each of us - but many quiet people own a whole bunch of them. That's something to work with!

While you clearly benefit from your strengths you might as well do so from your hurdles. Knowing your own hurdles leads

you to better understand your needs more than anyone not paying heed to his weaknesses. I, for instance, used to deem myself unsociable because of my tendency to develop sudden cravings for solitary moments while spending time with family and friends. Today I know such a retreat is a logical need to help me refill my exhausted energy reserves. I wouldn't call that a weakness any more than I should call an extrovert's special need to get reconfirming feedback from those around him a weakness.

Herewith I heartily invite you to understand your strengths as well as your hurdles. Embrace both as good friends and lifelong companions. That will enable you to impact on a given situation more easily in such a way that it "suits" you and lets you communicate more successfully.

Two questions are particularly helpful for analyzing different types of human interaction:

1. In a given situation, what kind of strengths will especially benefit the quiet ones among us?
2. In a given situation, what should the quiet ones among us pay particular attention to?

This book contains all my answers to these questions presented in such a way that you may easily adopt them to your own life.

### **What you will find in this book - and how to read it**

On the pages to come, the answers to both questions have been related to a variety of life situations such as professional and personal situations, formal and less formal events, presentations and negotiations. If you, valued reader, see yourself as belonging to the quiet type, this book is meant to help you adapt to an often all too noisy world and enable you to successfully perform the things that are important to you. All sections are written from an introvert's perspective.

If you rather belong to the extrovert type, reading this book will enable you to better understand your quiet fellow humans and value their strengths - whether spouse or partner, relative or friend, co-worker or superior, employee or seminar participant.

If you are unsure about which type you are, a test in the first chapter will give you a hint. The whole book is organized in such a way that you may be able to relate each

topic to your personal situation. Frequently you'll find questions assisting you on your way forward. Seize the opportunity to come to more familiar terms with yourself and improve your communications with those around you!

In its structure, the book reflects the way introverts think, from the inside out. It starts with a focus on personality. Part One provides an introduction and a summary of the quiet people's typical strengths and hurdles - you may want to read this part first as it contains the basics. Part Two with Chapters Five and Six shows a panorama of personal and professional environments and those things that would make quiet people feel comfortable and act successfully.

Most importantly, this part teaches you how to mould both personal and professional environment in a way that suits the introvert you are. All of the remaining chapters forming Part Three of the book will instruct you how to profit from these very strengths and overcome hurdles in the interaction with those around you.

I have deliberately stressed the strengths and hurdles most important for establishing contact, negotiating, presenting and meeting with others. After doing the test and making yourself familiar with the overview at the end of Chapter One you will be able to identify those personal characteristics that are most relevant to each given situation.

In the following chapters you will encounter several of my quiet seminar participants and coaching clients whose (anonymized) stories illustrate how introverts can make proper use of their strengths in different situations. I hope your experiences will encourage you to read on and try and put introvert communication into due practice.

## **The quiet are moving the world!**

Numerous well-known past and present public figures have been quiet people according to their reported characteristics. See the following illustrious list:

### **Prominent introvert personalities: a gallery**

- Ilse Aichinger, author, Austria
- Woody Allen, film director, author, actor, and musician, United States

- Lance Armstrong, professional cyclist, seven-time winner of the Tour de France, United States
- Julian Assange, journalist and speaker of WikiLeaks, Australia
- Brenda Barnes, chairman and CEO of Sara Lee, a producer of consumer goods, United States
- Ingrid Bergman, actress, Sweden
- Warren Buffet, large-scale investor and business leader, United States
- Cacau, German international soccer player of Brazilian origin
- Frédéric Chopin, composer and pianist, Poland
- Marie Curie, chemist and physicist, Nobel laureate for physics and chemistry, Poland
- Charles Darwin, natural scientist and founder of evolution theory, United Kingdom
- Bob Dylan, musician, poet, and painter, United States
- Clint Eastwood, actor, United States
- Albert Einstein, physicist, Nobel laureate for physics, Germany
- Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, called Mahatma Gandhi, spiritual father of the Indian independence movement
- Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft, United States
- Sir Alfred Hitchcock, film director, United Kingdom
- Michael Jackson, musician, United States
- Günther Jauch, TV presenter, journalist and producer, Germany
- Franz Kafka, German-language writer from Prague
- Immanuel Kant, enlightenment philosopher, Germany
- Avril Lavigne, singer and songwriter, Canada
- Loriot (real name: Vicco von Bülow), humorist, Germany
- Angela Merkel, German chancellor
- Sir Isaac Newton, physicist, mathematician, philosopher, and theologian, United Kingdom
- Barack Obama, President of the United States
- Michelle Pfeiffer, actress, United States
- Claudia Schiffer, model, Germany
- George Soros, investor and foundation founder, Hungary/United States
- Steven Spielberg, film director, producer and screenwriter, United States

- Gabriele Strehle, fashion designer (Strenesse), Germany
- Tilda Swinton, actress, United Kingdom
- Mother Teresa, nun, Nobel laureate, Albania/India
- Charles Mountbatten-Windsor, Prince of Wales, Duke of Cornwall, heir apparent of the United Kingdom
- Mark Zuckerberg, computer scientist, founder of Facebook, United States

So you see many of our planet's most successful, powerful, gifted, innovative, courageous, intelligent and interesting people are of the quiet type. They are neither better than extroverts nor inferior like they often deem themselves. What makes them successful is mainly the fact that they remain true to themselves, their introvert nature and the rest of their characteristics. That is a wonderful recipe for success, which I warmly recommend you to adopt. Stay true to yourself as an introvert, do what suits you and your needs. Like the people in our gallery, with your strengths you will quietly change the world. As Dolly Parton once said:

*»Find out who you are - and do it on purpose!«*

PS: A word to the experts. In the academic literature »extraversion« is more common than »extroversion«. However, I'll keep to colloquial language and use the latter.

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## **Part One**

**Who you are.**

**What you are able to.**

**What you need.**

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### **1. Why quiet?!**

Jonas has studied engineering at a reputable technical university. He has two friends he likes to spend time with, such as going to the cinema or working out. Furthermore, he is active in the Web 2.0 community, using Facebook and Twitter to keep in touch with former schoolmates and acquaintances from several training courses. At this moment, he serves an internship with a well-known German automobile company.

When it comes to love and romance, however, Jonas is less successful. Even though university's percentage of women is low, Jonas almost never visits parties or concerts as noise and big crowds stress him out. Meanwhile he is thinking about using a dating website as a way to get in touch with suitable women.

In his studies he is proceeding well. He has passed all written tests by preparing systematically for each of them. He doesn't feel comfortable presenting to big seminar groups and he abhors aural exams. In his leisure time he likes to run. While jogging he sometimes finds ideas for his second hobby, taking pictures of subjects, in which nature and technology combine to form something new, such as bridges and industrial buildings.

## **What is being quiet all about?**

### **Introversion and extroversion**

Most of us can be classified as either extrovert or introvert. Almost everybody has an idea of what these notions mean and associates certain characteristics with them. Taking a closer look, either in real life or in literature, the line between them quickly becomes blurred. Too diverse are the various manifestations and possible definitions of introversion and extroversion.

### **The personality factor**

Firstly, whether you are an introvert or an extrovert depends on your personality. We are born with a predisposition either for introversion or for extroversion, including certain characteristics and needs to make us what we are. Little children already show clear signs of introversion or extroversion. The conceptual pair can be more easily understood as soon as we don't fathom it as a contrastive pair but rather as the extremes of a continuum.

Each of us has both introvert and extrovert characteristics. And each of us is born with some leeway for movement, some kind of a comfort zone on the introvert-extrovert axis where we feel at ease. For most of us this zone is located somewhere in the centre with a tendency to either the introvert or the extrovert.

All bandwidths are healthy, only at the extremes at the far end of the continuum, be it to the introvert or extrovert side, do problems arise. What is totally unhealthy is constantly living outside your personal comfort zone. An acoustically sensitive introvert such as Jonas who is permanently exposed to high noise levels will be drained of a lot of energy while being unable to refuel. If he forced himself to sell cars rather than serving his internship at the company's headquarters, he ultimately would find himself unhappy and exhausted. In the worst case, spending too much of your life outside your comfort zone can make you ill.

## **The situation factor**

Secondly, whether you feel or behave like an introvert or an extrovert depends on the situation. People are amazingly apt to adapt. The capacity to think and act according to each given situation is one of our defining characteristics as human beings.

At every point of our lives we are essentially free to be one way or another. It has nothing to do with inherently being an introvert or an extrovert. It's rather a matter of intelligence or even discipline. We consciously decide to behave in a certain way even if our impulse-driven reaction might be quite a different one.

The part we play in a certain situation has an impact on our decision how to communicate. Completely different factors may define our behaviour. Are we in our relationship to other people in a strong or in a weak position? What do people expect from us? How would we like to present ourselves?

For example, chatting with his younger cousins on his mother's birthday, Jonas will therefore exude the cheerfulness and confidence of the more experienced one. He will treat his older aunts however with politeness, patiently answering their questions. At his internship company's fair stand he will keep a rather low profile when it comes to addressing crowds of strangers, but nevertheless he will try to do what his professional responsibility imposes on him.

Even a strong extrovert such as Anke Engelke will certainly experience moments that leave her speechless, or in which she deliberately keeps her mouth shut. Many extroverts I know enjoy and even need moments of calm and silence in turbulent times. On the whole, this flexibility serves us well as it provides us with plenty of leeway to move and act as we choose.

## **The culture factor**

Thirdly, the culture we are part of demands from us a certain adaptability towards either introversion or extroversion. In a country such as Japan, the ability to calm down and to focus and reflect on oneself is highly valued. Sitting together in silence is an important part of every encounter among friends.

Introverts from other countries find such an experience very soothing. In a typical "extrovert culture" such as the United States a situation, in which neither of the dialogue partners utters a word, is perceived as embarrassing, or at least awkward. Whether in personal or in professional life, spending most time in groups is considered normal. In the United States as well as in Germany and other European countries, an introvert will feel a stronger need to adapt to extrovert behaviours than in Japan with its »introvert-friendly« culture.

### **The career factor**

Fourthly, things may change during a lifetime. When growing older most of us tend to drift more to the centre with our introvert or extrovert characteristics thus becoming more »moderate«. In the second half of life extrovert people find it easier to adopt an introvert approach and to appreciate its usefulness, as it helps them to reflect on their lives, on values and meaning.

In spite of being dependent on situation, culture, and even age, introversion and extroversion are rather stable personality traits manifesting themselves in certain characteristics and preferences. The answer to one key question is crucial:

- **The introvert/extrovert key question: Where comes the energy from?**

That is, how will a person behave that is stressed and/or exhausted and wants to recharge?

### **Introvert and extrovert energy sources**

There are mainly two possible answers to this question. For one, that person might draw energy from the interaction with others. My husband is a good example: Having spent a stressful day he likes going out with friends, playing soccer with his teammates or participating in a club meeting. These are the traits of an extrovert.

On the other hand one may "clam up" trying to refresh and reenergize in the presence of as few people, stimuli, and words as possible. That's the category I belong to. After a day spent in a seminar I prefer to stay alone in my hotel room reading without uttering a word, or I might meet a good woman

friend, enjoying a relaxing conversation. After three days of workshop I need half a day for myself in order to recharge all my batteries. You guessed it, this way of relaxing is rather an introvert trait.

For introverts, an abundance of stimuli is exhausting. In professional life, this might be a task with lots of aspects to be kept in mind. In personal life, it might be a party with unfamiliar people and noisy music, a situation being perceived as stressful even by young introverts such as Jonas. An introvert subjected to over-stimulation often feels tempted to withdraw.

In contrast, extroverts love stimulation as it provides them with energy. They look out for changes whenever they are thrown onto themselves without external stimulation. In libraries, hospitals or companies with one-person offices they tend to gravitate towards common spaces where social interaction is possible, such as cafeterias, lounges, small kitchens and areas with easy access to communication technologies. To an extrovert sitting alone in his office, a phone and a computer allowing to keep in contact with the outer world would be crucial.

### **A desire for calmness and silence**

That isn't to say that extroverts wouldn't have any need for quiet moments. Introverts however are existentially dependent on "time spent alone" in order to recover from stressful social interactions. Without such quiet moments they would become irritable and exhausted. On the average, introverts need a longer stretch of low-stimulus time before they are ready to plunge again into the bustle of life. A three-week holiday in the loneliness of a Swedish forest is the dream of an introvert rather than an extrovert.

### **Answer this question:**

Soon you will be able to test whether you are an introvert or an extrovert. What would you guess by now?

I am rather an introvert.

I am rather an extrovert.

Both sides are equally pronounced.

Neither one type is better or worse. Each of them simply describes where your preferences and need are. The better you know what you need the more you are able to live »your style« and do what is important to you. For that, what you need most is to find your specific balance between the time you spend alone and the time you spend with others. Learn to systematically ask the right questions. What do I need right now? You'll notice almost always you know the answer already.

**The key question for »living your style«: What do I need right now?**

### **Windmills and batteries**

A metaphor taken from another field of energy generation makes the difference even clearer. An extrovert produces energy like a windmill, depending only on external impulses to do so, but also needing to actively participate and dynamically »revolve« in the process.

On the contrary, an introvert is like a battery, recharging while staying in idle mode without any »wind blowing« and showing as low an activity level as possible. As »batteries«, they need more time to recharge.

### **Extrovert and introvert brains**

Brain scientists are now able to prove that introverts use more energy than extroverts for their brain activity. Measurements have shown a higher level of electrical activity not only while performing mentally challenging tasks, but rather continuously.

This increased energy expenditure notably occurs in the frontal cortex, the part of our brain responsible for managing what is happening within us such as learning, deciding, remembering and problem solving. Thus introverts need more energy to process impressions, thereby emptying their batteries faster than extroverts who, as »wind mills«, are even able to simultaneously recharge and expend energy. For introverts, economizing on their inner energy is therefore of particular importance.

External stimuli have a stronger impact on introvert than on extrovert brains. Introverts react to the environment in a more sensitive way. There is a higher risk of over-stimulation

and a stronger need for energy in order to process impressions.

It follows that even a low noise level may be enough to distract an introvert like Jonas from a mental activity such as learning. For his extrovert fellow student, however, a moderate background noise as compared to total silence may even support the learning process.

That doesn't mean that an extrovert is »livelier« than an introvert. Conversely, introverts aren't »by nature« quieter than extroverts. Even the label »shy« hasn't anything to do with being an introvert. Shy people are mainly characterized by one thing: they fear social contact. Often they don't feel up to the challenges of interacting with others. But fear has nothing to do with the distinction between introverts and extroverts. It can afflict both types.

### **Introvert means something completely different from shy or highly sensitive**

Being »highly sensitive« has nothing to do with being an introvert, either. It describes a nervous system that is particularly sensitive to external influences that may easily lead to a sensory overload, but may also come with special empathetic capabilities. While a relatively high percentage of highly sensitive people are in fact introverts, it is also true that 30 percent of them are extroverts, according to psychologist Elaine Aron. For Aron's website and a test that may help you making a personal assessment, see the appendix.

### **Extroverts and introverts: their discovery and new insights**

#### **Freud and Jung**

Some 100 years ago, Sigmund Freud (an extrovert) developed modern psychoanalysis. For him sexuality was the driving force in the subconscious mind of every human being. His younger colleague and dialog partner Carl Gustav Jung (an introvert) questioned Freud's theory. He developed an all-encompassing model of the subconscious mind that, in addition to sexuality, included other topics as well. The differing theoretical assumptions didn't benefit the two scientists' relationship.

They separated their work and henceforth conducted their research activities independently.

In his 1921 book *Psychological Types*, Jung for the first time defined introversion and extroversion as attitude types with a strong bearing on the personality of each. He identified four different functions (thinking, feeling, intuition and sensation) further characterizing the personalities of both, introverts and extroverts.

Jung's differentiation between introversion and extroversion is a recurring ingredient of every major personality typology. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, which is particularly popular in the United States, and the Insights Test closely follow the original classification by taking into account all four functions defined by Jung.

Methods such as the "Big Five" Test, the Reiss Profile, the Alpha Plus Analysis and the Structogram Analysis also make use of the »introvert« and »extrovert« pattern. However, there is no standardized definition, with even their denomination being different in some cases. Interestingly, the "Big Five" Test summarizes the »introvert« and »extrovert« types under the generic term »extroversion« - the logical equivalent of summarizing man and woman under the generic term »woman«.