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Introverts Can Network and So Can You

By Susan Dunn

"Introverts Can Network and So Can You,"

by Susan Dunn, MA, The EQ Coach

Tomaso arrives at the office with a bag of breakfast tacos for the staff. He sells paper, a highly competitive business, and he's a top salesman for his company. Tomaso is also an introvert.

The smart people have always known that business is about relationships. Now it's called "networking," and it's always been the way to make money. Twenty years ago, my mentor told me, "Here's the key, Susan. People do business with people they like and trust. That's all you need to know." Networking is the only way to do that.

Fear of strangers is absolute human nature, and you deny this at your peril. It's monumentally important in today's multicultural environment. It's survival instinct to be wary of people we don't know and to notice differences. These reactions which come from the reptilian brain are strong and unavoidable. In our animal brains, any human could potentially harm us.

So initially we react with suspicion to what we don't know. We may over-ride it with all the things we know intellectually, but it's an over-ride. In other words it takes time. In good response fashion (vs. "reacting") we move from the reptilian brain up to the limbic (social instincts, which we also have) and then the neocortex (what we know intellectually).

Building relationships is all about giving the other person time to experience you and to get over any negative initial impressions. Relationships build slowly and they run on talking. There's no such thing as small talk; it's all big!

So how can an introvert do this when extroverts appear to have the edge? They're over-represented in the higher levels of management, and show up anywhere more often. Since there are more extroverts, and since they are more "in your face," most situations are geared toward their preferences. So we have Chamber mixers where people can run around handing out their cards which are quickly deposited in the circular file as soon as the person returns to their office, but the savvy introvert goes

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about it differently.

Let's look at how Tomaso works. The receptionist, Maria, is his entry point. He watches and listens to her closely with the great intuition most introverts have. He calls and say, "Hi chica, I'm bringing breakfast tacos tomorrow. Let everyone know." Notice that he doesn't try a manager, or the CEO.

Maria likes him immediately, so she helps him out. "Good," she says. "That other guys brings cookies and we want breakfast tacos. Bring potato and egg, chorizo and egg, and bacon and egg. And label them."

Tomaso does exactly that. When he arrives, he gives Maria the bag, and she goes to work. She announces the breakfast tacos have arrived.

Meanwhile, Tomaso knows Maria can't leave the desk, so he's brought her the kind of tacos she likes, with a plate, salt and pepper, and a small container of hot sauce. He's thoughtful. He notices.

Then Tomaso walks down the hall to Christina's office. Christina's Anglo, Germanic background, formal and reserved, but he knows she will be polite.

"Hi chica," he says. "The tacos are here." Then he stands there with a big smile on his face and says nothing else, just looks available and quizzical. Christina's in upper level management and swings into action. He just follows her sophisticated lead in conversation.

Then they move down to the break room where people have gathered. Tomaso enters and takes the extended hand of Saul, the CFO and shakes it firmly. Saul's a talker, and all Tomaso has to do is listen to Saul brag. His eyes senses remain alert to who else is entering the room. He takes the temperature and listens for conversational cues. (Perhaps there's mention of a new copier, or the power failure of the day before.)

Anne walks in. An introvert, she's the most important person to Tomaso. She works for the Supply Manager, the one who orders the paper.

Tomaso moves over toward Anne, remaining at the farther distance introverts prefer, and just beams, radiating warmth. He relaxes his body, extends his palms slightly forward, suggesting, though not initiating a hug. He knows Anne's the "mother" of the group, and suspects she will hug him. Which she does, but he knows to let the introvert lead. He's just available for what will likely transpire. And so it proceeds. Keen to the different personalities he's dealing with, he works the room mostly by standing there smiling.

When he leaves, Anne asks, "Is he the one who's wife is expecting?" No one can answer. Things went well; Tomaso didn't talk about himself. Much of what we call "relating," has to do with listening, with a few filler phrases and nonverbals. Here are a few. Say and do them without anxiety, and you'll have most of the work done:

—Raise your eyebrows and say, "Oh really?"

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--Purse your lips and furrow your brows and say, "Is that right? I didn't know that."

--Smile, maintain an open body posture, move slowly, observe preferred distances in position, and say just about anything light and inconsequential: "Good to see you," "Boy, red is really your color," or "How about them Bears?"

--Use facts with men; talk to women about their appearance. Nothing suggestive, of course. Notice a bracelet, a ring.

Notice that Tomaso calls all the women "Chica," (no translation) – just affectionate and complimentary, with no sexual overtones. And notice he calls ALL the women this; don't play favorites.

The less you say the better, and of course avoid controversial topics, which can sometimes include such innocuous topics as weather and traffic, if they're particularly bad. It's been over 100 degrees here for a week, 102 yesterday, and it was THE ONE THING nobody was talking about. Avoiding the most obvious thing on your mind is often a good policy.

When in doubt, talk about what's right in front of you. For instance, about the tacos – "Did you find one you like? Did I bring enough hot sauce?"

"What's new?" always works. So does, "How are you doing?" The introvert is the perfect audience for the extrovert, and in work groups, you can both expect far more extroverts, and count on that many of the introverts will be acting like extroverts. There's far less need to make conversation than you may fear.

Things to avoid? Anything heavy, including being "too" anything. The trick is to appear like you're not trying at all. Resist urges to get introspective, say anything significant, or teach anything. For more specific tips, see "Networking for Introverts."

At the bottom line, all that's required of you is that you show up, and stay out of trouble. The less you say, the less likely you'll be to get into trouble, which is easy for introverts. Since most people are clamoring for attention and dying to be heard, your work is a whole lot easier than you might think. Smile, listen, be light and neutral, stay, and return.

Susan Dunn, The EQ Coach,

<http://www.susandunn.cc>

. Coaching, Internet courses and ebooks

around emotional intelligence for your personal and professional success. "Networking for Introverts" is available on her website. Training and certification for EQ coaches – fast, affordable, comprehensive and no-residency. Mailto:sdunn@susandunn.cc for more information.

Stress Reactions in Introverts and Extroverts

By Nancy R. Fenn

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One of the biggest differences between introverts and extroverts is how they react to stress.

Some people don't understand how introverts react to stress. Because of this, they think that all introverts are "neurotic" or mentally ill. Let me explain why this is a misperception.

When extroverts are stressed they "act out". They may smoke, drink, yell and scream, throw a punch, stomp around or generally raise the roof. Although this behavior is difficult and even obnoxious, it is not considered "mentally ill".

When introverts are stressed, they withdraw. They do this to recharge their batteries, not because they are neurotic. Introverts need time alone to bring order back into their inner world. They give energy to others and receive energy when alone.

Let's look at some of the things that can stress introverts.

- Introverts are territorial. Someone cannot take your seat, move your stuff, lean on your desk, ignore your closed door or borrow your clothes without making you very angry.
- Introverts need time alone to recharge their batteries. If denied time alone, you may become irritable and depressed.
- Introverts value privacy. When your boundaries are disregarded, when someone has a loud personal conversation on their cell phone in your captive presence, such as waiting in the checkout line at the grocery store, you can be annoyed and offended.
- Introverts fear failure in public and experience deep humiliation because of it.
- Introverts prefer to communicate in writing. They may feel exhausted by too much verbal communication that "isn't going anywhere". Introverts hate small talk and cell phones.
- Introverts like to be prepared. If rushed to present a solution or opinion, they may be extremely uncomfortable and sometimes refuse to do so at all.

What are some of the ways that introverts restore balance?

- Introverts need to spend at least half their time alone for optimal good health
- Introverts love long trips, walks in nature and usually enjoy the company of animals. These activities restore their peace of mind and equilibrium.
- Introverts give energy when they are with people and need to be alone to recharge their batteries.
- Introverts need a room of their own with a door that closes.
- Introverts need to give themselves permission to communicate via email or in writing and to ignore phone calls or get a good answering machine.
- Decision making should take place without time pressure if possible. Introverts like to be prepared!

If you're an introvert, it's important to understand your natural reactions to stress and what you can do

to restore your equilibrium. Retreats into self are neither neurotic nor mentally ill. They are a natural restorative to introverts.

Nancy R. Fenn is an intuitive consultant in the San Diego area. Her mission in life is to raise consciousness about introversion as a legitimate personality style.



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