

Quiet

THE POWER OF INTROVERTS
IN A WORLD THAT CAN'T
STOP TALKING

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INTRODUCTION

The North and South of Temperament

Montgomery, Alabama. December 1, 1955. Early evening. A public bus pulls to a stop and a sensibly dressed woman in her forties gets on. She carries herself erectly, despite having spent the day bent over an ironing board in a dingy basement tailor shop at the Montgomery Fair department store. Her feet are swollen, her shoulders ache. She sits in the first row of the Colored section and watches quietly as the bus fills with riders. Until the driver orders her to give her seat to a white passenger.

The woman utters a single word that ignites one of the most important civil rights protests of the twentieth century, one word that helps America find its better self.

The word is "No."

The driver threatens to have her arrested.

"You may do that," says Rosa Parks.

A police officer arrives. He asks Parks why she won't move.

"Why do you all push us around?" she answers simply.

"I don't know," he says. "But the law is the law, and you're under arrest."

On the afternoon of her trial and conviction for disorderly conduct, the Montgomery Improvement Association holds a rally for Parks at the

Holt Street Baptist Church, in the poorest section of town. Five thousand gather to support Parks's lonely act of courage. They squeeze inside the church until its pews can hold no more. The rest wait patiently outside, listening through loudspeakers. The Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. addresses the crowd. "There comes a time that people get tired of being trampled over by the iron feet of oppression," he tells them. "There comes a time when people get tired of being pushed out of the glittering sunlight of life's July and left standing amidst the piercing chill of an Alpine November."

He praises Parks's bravery and hugs her. She stands silently, her mere presence enough to galvanize the crowd. The association launches a city-wide bus boycott that lasts 381 days. The people trudge miles to work. They carpool with strangers. They change the course of American history.

I had always imagined Rosa Parks as a stately woman with a bold temperament, someone who could easily stand up to a busload of glowering passengers. But when she died in 2005 at the age of ninety-two, the flood of obituaries recalled her as soft-spoken, sweet, and small in stature. They said she was "timid and shy" but had "the courage of a lion." They were full of phrases like "radical humility" and "quiet fortitude." What does it mean to be quiet *and* have fortitude? these descriptions asked implicitly. How could you be shy *and* courageous?

Parks herself seemed aware of this paradox, calling her autobiography *Quiet Strength*—a title that challenges us to question our assumptions. Why *shouldn't* quiet be strong? And what else can quiet do that we don't give it credit for?



Our lives are shaped as profoundly by personality as by gender or race. And the single most important aspect of personality—the "north and south of temperament," as one scientist puts it—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 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."* It's reflected in our brain pathways, neurotransmitters, and remote corners of our nervous systems. Today introversion and extroversion are two of the most exhaustively researched subjects in personality psychology, arousing the curiosity of hundreds of scientists.

These researchers have made exciting discoveries aided by the latest technology, but they're part of a long and storied tradition. Poets and philosophers have been thinking about introverts and extroverts since the dawn of recorded time. Both personality types appear in the Bible and in the writings of Greek and Roman physicians, and some evolutionary psychologists say that the history of these types reaches back even farther than that: the animal kingdom also boasts "introverts" and "extroverts," as we'll see, from fruit flies to pumpkinseed fish to rhesus monkeys. As with other complementary pairings—masculinity and femininity, East and West, liberal and conservative—humanity would be unrecognizable, and vastly diminished, without both personality styles.

Take the partnership of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr.: a formidable orator refusing to give up his seat on a segregated bus wouldn't have had the same effect as a modest woman who'd clearly prefer to keep silent but for the exigencies of the situation. And Parks *didn't* have the *stuff* to thrill a crowd if she'd tried to stand up and announce that she had a dream. But with King's help, she *didn't* have to.

Yet today we make room for a remarkably narrow range of personality styles. We're told that to be great is to be bold, to be happy is to be sociable. We see ourselves as a nation of extroverts—which means that we've lost sight of who we really are. Depending on which study you consult, one third to one half of Americans are introverts—in other words,

*Answer key: exercise: extroverts; commit adultery: extroverts; function well without sleep: introverts; learn from our mistakes: introverts; place big bets: extroverts; delay gratification: introverts; be a good leader: in some cases introverts, in other cases extroverts, depending on the type of leadership called for; ask "what if": introverts.

one out of every two or three people you know. (Given that the United States is among the most extroverted of nations, the number must be at least as high in other parts of the world.) If you're not an introvert yourself, you are surely raising, managing, married to, or coupled with one.

If these statistics surprise you, that's probably because so many people pretend to be extroverts. Closet introverts pass undetected on playgrounds, in high school locker rooms, and in the corridors of corporate America. Some fool even themselves, until some life event—a layoff, an empty nest, an inheritance that frees them to spend time as they like—jolts them into taking stock of their true natures. You have only to raise the subject of this book with your friends and acquaintances to find that the most unlikely people consider themselves introverts.

It makes sense that so many introverts hide even from themselves. We live with a value system that I call the Extrovert Ideal—the omnipresent belief that the ideal self is gregarious, alpha, and comfortable in the spotlight. The archetypal extrovert prefers action to contemplation, risk-taking to heed-taking, certainty to doubt. He favors quick decisions, even at the risk of being wrong. She works well in teams and socializes in groups. We like to think that we value individuality, but all too often we admire one type of individual—the kind who's comfortable “putting himself out there.” Sure, we allow technologically gifted loners who launch companies in garages to have any personality they please, but they are the exceptions, not the rule, and our tolerance extends mainly to those who get fabulously wealthy or hold the promise of doing so.

Introversion—along with its cousins sensitivity, seriousness, and shyness—is now a second-class personality trait, somewhere between a disappointment and a pathology. Introverts living under the Extrovert Ideal are like women in a man's world, discounted because of a trait that goes to the core of who they are. Extroversion is an enormously appealing personality style, but we've turned it into an oppressive standard to which most of us feel we must conform.

The Extrovert Ideal has been documented in many studies, though this research has never been grouped under a single name. Talkative people, for example, are rated as smarter, better-looking, more interesting, and more desirable as friends. Velocity of speech counts as well as volume: we rank fast talkers as more competent and likable than slow

ones. The same dynamics apply in groups, where research shows that the voluble are considered smarter than the reticent—even though there's zero correlation between the gift of gab and good ideas. Even the word *introvert* is stigmatized—one informal study, by psychologist Laurie Helgoe, found that introverts described their own physical appearance in vivid language (“green-blue eyes,” “exotic,” “high cheekbones”), but when asked to describe generic introverts they drew a bland and distasteful picture (“ungainly,” “neutral colors,” “skin problems”).

But we make a grave mistake to embrace the Extrovert Ideal so unthinkingly. Some of our greatest ideas, art, and inventions—from the theory of evolution to van Gogh's sunflowers to the personal computer—came from quiet and cerebral people who knew how to tune in to their inner worlds and the treasures to be found there. Without introverts, the world would be devoid of:

the theory of gravity

the theory of relativity

W. B. Yeats's “The Second Coming”

Chopin's nocturnes

Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*

Peter Pan

Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm*

The Cat in the Hat

Charlie Brown

Schindler's List, *E.T.*, and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*

Google

Harry Potter*

As the science journalist Winifred Gallagher writes: “The glory of the disposition that stops to consider stimuli rather than rushing to engage with them is its long association with intellectual and artistic achievement. Neither $E=mc^2$ nor *Paradise Lost* was dashed off by a party

* Sir Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein, W. B. Yeats, Frédéric Chopin, Marcel Proust, J. M. Barrie, George Orwell, Theodor Geisel (Dr. Seuss), Charles Schulz, Steven Spielberg, Larry Page, J. K. Rowling.

animal." Even in less obviously introverted occupations, like finance, politics, and activism, some of the greatest leaps forward were made by introverts. In this book we'll see how figures like Eleanor Roosevelt, Al Gore, Warren Buffett, Gandhi—and Rosa Parks—achieved what they did not in spite of but *because* of their introversion.

Yet, as *Quiet* will explore, many of the most important institutions of contemporary life are designed for those who enjoy group projects and high levels of stimulation. As children, our classroom desks are increasingly arranged in pods, the better to foster group learning, and research suggests that the vast majority of teachers believe that the ideal student is an extrovert. We watch TV shows whose protagonists are not the "children next door," like the Cindy Bradys and Beaver Cleavers of yesteryear, but rock stars and webcast hostesses with outsized personalities, like Hannah Montana and Carly Shay of *iCarly*. Even Sid the Science Kid, a PBS-sponsored role model for the preschool set, kicks off each school day by performing dance moves with his pals. ("Check out my moves! I'm a rock star!")

As adults, many of us work for organizations that insist we work in teams, in offices without walls, for supervisors who value "people skills" above all. To advance our careers, we're expected to promote ourselves unabashedly. The scientists whose research gets funded often have confident, perhaps overconfident, personalities. The artists whose work adorns the walls of contemporary museums strike impressive poses at gallery openings. The authors whose books get published—once accepted as a reclusive breed—are now vetted by publicists to make sure they're talk-show ready. (You wouldn't be reading this book if I hadn't convinced my publisher that I was enough of a pseudo-extrovert to promote it.)

If you're an introvert, you also know that the bias against quiet can cause deep psychic pain. As a child you might have overheard your parents apologize for your shyness. ("Why can't you be more like the Kennedy boys?" the Camelot-besotted parents of one man I interviewed repeatedly asked him.) Or at school you might have been prodded to come "out of your shell"—that noxious expression which fails to appreciate that some animals naturally carry shelter everywhere they go, and that some humans are just the same. "All the comments from childhood still ring in my ears, that I was lazy, stupid, slow, boring," writes a member

of an e-mail list called Introvert Retreat. "By the time I was old enough to figure out that I was simply introverted, it was a part of my being, the assumption that there is something inherently wrong with me. I wish I could find that little vestige of doubt and remove it."

Now that you're an adult, you might still feel a pang of guilt when you decline a dinner invitation in favor of a good book. Or maybe you like to eat alone in restaurants and could do without the pitying looks from fellow diners. Or you're told that you're "in your head too much," a phrase that's often deployed against the quiet and cerebral.

Of course, there's another word for such people: thinkers.



I have seen firsthand how difficult it is for introverts to take stock of their own talents, and how powerful it is when finally they do. For more than ten years I trained people of all stripes—corporate lawyers and college students, hedge-fund managers and married couples—in negotiation skills. Of course, we covered the basics: how to prepare for a negotiation, when to make the first offer, and what to do when the other person says "take it or leave it." But I also helped clients figure out their natural personalities and how to make the most of them.

My very first client was a young woman named Laura. She was a Wall Street lawyer, but a quiet and daydreamy one who dreaded the spotlight and disliked aggression. She had managed somehow to make it through the crucible of Harvard Law School—a place where classes are conducted in huge, gladiatorial amphitheatres, and where she once got so nervous that she threw up on the way to class. Now that she was in the real world, she wasn't sure she could represent her clients as forcefully as they expected.

For the first three years on the job, Laura was so junior that she never had to test this premise. But one day the senior lawyer she'd been working with went on vacation, leaving her in charge of an important negotiation. The client was a South American manufacturing company that was about to default on a bank loan and hoped to renegotiate its terms;

a syndicate of bankers that owned the endangered loan sat on the other side of the negotiating table.

Laura would have preferred to hide under said table, but she was accustomed to fighting such impulses. Gamely but nervously, she took her spot in the lead chair, flanked by her clients: general counsel on one side and senior financial officer on the other. These happened to be Laura's favorite clients: gracious and soft-spoken, very different from the master-of-the-universe types her firm usually represented. In the past, Laura had taken the general counsel to a Yankees game and the financial officer shopping for a handbag for her sister. But now these cozy outings—just the kind of socializing Laura enjoyed—seemed a world away. Across the table sat nine disgruntled investment bankers in tailored suits and expensive shoes, accompanied by their lawyer, a square-jawed woman with a hearty manner. Clearly not the self-doubting type, this woman launched into an impressive speech on how Laura's clients would be lucky simply to accept the bankers' terms. It was, she said, a very magnanimous offer.

Everyone waited for Laura to reply, but she couldn't think of anything to say. So she just sat there. Blinking. All eyes on her. Her clients shifting uneasily in their seats. Her thoughts running in a familiar loop: *I'm too quiet for this kind of thing, too unassuming, too cerebral.* She imagined the person who would be better equipped to save the day: someone bold, smooth, ready to pound the table. In middle school this person, unlike Laura, would have been called "outgoing," the highest accolade her seventh-grade classmates knew, higher even than "pretty," for a girl, or "athletic," for a guy. Laura promised herself that she only had to make it through the day. Tomorrow she would go look for another career.

Then she remembered what I'd told her again and again: she was an introvert, and as such she had unique powers in negotiation—perhaps less obvious but no less formidable. She'd probably prepared more than everyone else. She had a quiet but firm speaking style. She rarely spoke without thinking. Being mild-mannered, she could take strong, even aggressive, positions while coming across as perfectly reasonable. And she tended to ask questions—lots of them—and actually listen to the answers, which, no matter what your personality, is crucial to strong negotiation.

So Laura finally started doing what came naturally.

"Let's go back a step. What are your numbers based on?" she asked.

"What if we structured the loan this way, do you think it might work?"

"That way?"

"Some other way?"

At first her questions were tentative. She picked up steam as she went along, posing them more forcefully and making it clear that she'd done her homework and wouldn't concede the facts. But she also stayed true to her own style, never raising her voice or losing her decorum. Every time the bankers made an assertion that seemed unbudgeable, Laura tried to be constructive. "Are you saying that's the only way to go? What if we took a different approach?"

Eventually her simple queries shifted the mood in the room, just as the negotiation textbooks say they will. The bankers stopped speechifying and dominance-posing, activities for which Laura felt hopelessly ill-equipped, and they started having an actual conversation.

More discussion. Still no agreement. One of the bankers revved up again, throwing his papers down and storming out of the room. Laura ignored this display, mostly because she didn't know what else to do. Later on someone told her that at that pivotal moment she'd played a good game of something called "negotiation jujitsu"; but she knew that she was just doing what you learn to do naturally as a quiet person in a loudmouth world.

Finally the two sides struck a deal. The bankers left the building, Laura's favorite clients headed for the airport, and Laura went home, curled up with a book, and tried to forget the day's tensions.

But the next morning, the lead lawyer for the bankers—the vigorous woman with the strong jaw—called to offer her a job. "I've never seen anyone so nice and so tough at the same time," she said. And the day after that, the lead banker called Laura, asking if her law firm would represent his company in the future. "We need someone who can help us put deals together without letting ego get in the way," he said.

By sticking to her own gentle way of doing things, Laura had reeled in new business for her firm and a job offer for herself. Raising her voice and pounding the table was unnecessary.

Today Laura understands that her introversion is an essential part of

who she is, and she embraces her reflective nature. The loop inside her head that accused her of being too quiet and unassuming plays much less often. Laura knows that she can hold her own when she needs to.



What exactly do I mean when I say that Laura is an *introvert*? When I started writing this book, the first thing I wanted to find out was precisely how researchers define introversion and extroversion. I knew that in 1921 the influential psychologist Carl Jung had published a bombshell of a book, *Psychological Types*, popularizing the terms *introvert* and *extrovert* as the central building blocks of personality. Introverts are drawn to the inner world of thought and feeling, said Jung, extroverts to the external life of people and activities. Introverts focus on the meaning they make of the events swirling around them; extroverts plunge into the events themselves. Introverts 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 by the majority of universities and Fortune 100 companies, then you may already be familiar with these ideas.

But what do contemporary researchers have to say? I soon discovered that there is no all-purpose definition of introversion or extroversion; these are not unitary categories, like "curly-haired" or "sixteen-year-old," in which everyone can agree on who qualifies for inclusion. For example, adherents of the Big Five school of personality psychology (which argues that human personality can be boiled down to five primary traits) define introversion not in terms of a rich inner life but as a lack of qualities such as assertiveness and sociability. There are almost as many definitions of *introvert* and *extrovert* as there are personality psychologists, who spend a great deal of time arguing over which meaning is most accurate. Some think that Jung's ideas are outdated; others swear that he's the only one who got it right.

Still, today's psychologists tend to agree on several important points:

for example, that introverts and extroverts differ in the level of outside stimulation that they need to function well. Introverts feel "just right" with less stimulation, as when they sip wine with a close friend, solve a crossword puzzle, or read a book. Extroverts enjoy the extra bang that comes from activities like meeting new people, skiing slippery slopes, and cranking up the stereo. "Other people are very arousing," says the personality psychologist David Winter, explaining why your typical introvert would rather spend her vacation reading on the beach than partying on a cruise ship. "They arouse threat, fear, flight, and love. A hundred people are very stimulating compared to a hundred books or a hundred grains of sand."

Many psychologists would also agree that introverts and extroverts work differently. Extroverts tend to tackle assignments quickly. They make fast (sometimes rash) decisions, and are comfortable multitasking and risk-taking. They enjoy "the thrill of the chase" for rewards like money and status.

Introverts often work more slowly and deliberately. They like to focus on one task at a time and can have mighty powers of concentration. They're relatively immune to the lures of wealth and fame.

Our personalities also shape our social styles. Extroverts are the people who will add life to your dinner party and laugh generously at your jokes. They tend to be assertive, dominant, and in great need of company. 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. They're comfortable with conflict, but not with solitude.

Introverts, in contrast, may have strong social skills and enjoy parties and business meetings, but after a while wish they were home in their pajamas. They 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. They tend to dislike conflict. Many have a horror of small talk, but enjoy deep discussions.

A few things introverts are not: The word *introvert* is not a synonym for hermit or misanthrope. Introverts *can* be these things, but most

are perfectly friendly. One of the most humane phrases in the English language—"Only connect!"—was written by the distinctly introverted E. M. Forster in a novel exploring the question of how to achieve "human love at its height."

Nor are introverts necessarily shy. Shyness is the fear of social disapproval or humiliation, while introversion is a preference for environments that are not overstimulating. Shyness is inherently painful; introversion is not. One reason that people confuse the two concepts is that they sometimes overlap (though psychologists debate to what degree). Some psychologists map the two tendencies on vertical and horizontal axes, with the introvert-extrovert spectrum on the horizontal axis, and the anxious-stable spectrum on the vertical. With this model, you end up with four quadrants of personality types: calm extroverts, anxious (or impulsive) extroverts, calm introverts, and anxious introverts. In other words, you can be a shy extrovert, like Barbra Streisand, who has a larger-than-life personality and paralyzing stage fright; or a non-shy introvert, like Bill Gates, who by all accounts keeps to himself but is unfazed by the opinions of others.

You can also, of course, be both shy *and* an introvert: T. S. Eliot was a famously private soul who wrote in "The Waste Land" that he could "show you fear in a handful of dust." Many shy people turn inward, partly as a refuge from the socializing that causes them such anxiety. And many introverts are shy, partly as a result of receiving the message that there's something wrong with their preference for reflection, and partly because their physiologies, as we'll see, compel them to withdraw from high-stimulation environments.

But for all their differences, shyness and introversion have in common something profound. The mental state of a shy extrovert sitting quietly in a business meeting may be very different from that of a calm introvert—the shy person is afraid to speak up, while the introvert is simply overstimulated—but to the outside world, the two appear to be the same. This can give both types insight into how our reverence for alpha status blinds us to things that are good and smart and wise. For very different reasons, shy and introverted people might choose to spend their days in behind-the-scenes pursuits like inventing, or researching, or holding the hands of the gravely ill—or in leadership positions they ex-

ecute with quiet competence. These are not alpha roles, but the people who play them are role models all the same.



If you're still not sure where you fall on the introvert-extrovert spectrum, you can assess yourself here. Answer each question "true" or "false," choosing the answer that applies to you more often than not.*

1. _____ I prefer one-on-one conversations to group activities.
2. _____ I often prefer to express myself in writing.
3. _____ I enjoy solitude.
4. _____ I seem to care less than my peers about wealth, fame, and status.
5. _____ I dislike small talk, but I enjoy talking in depth about topics that matter to me.
6. _____ People tell me that I'm a good listener.
7. _____ I'm not a big risk-taker.
8. _____ I enjoy work that allows me to "dive in" with few interruptions.
9. _____ I like to celebrate birthdays on a small scale, with only one or two close friends or family members.
10. _____ People describe me as "soft-spoken" or "mellow."
11. _____ I prefer not to show or discuss my work with others until it's finished.
12. _____ I dislike conflict.
13. _____ I do my best work on my own.
14. _____ I tend to think before I speak.
15. _____ I feel drained after being out and about, even if I've enjoyed myself.
16. _____ I often let calls go through to voice mail.

* This is an informal quiz, not a scientifically validated personality test. The questions were formulated based on characteristics of introversion often accepted by contemporary researchers.

17. _____ If I had to choose, I'd prefer a weekend with absolutely nothing to do to one with too many things scheduled.
18. _____ I don't enjoy multitasking.
19. _____ I can concentrate easily.
20. _____ In classroom situations, I prefer lectures to seminars.

The more often you answered "true," the more introverted you probably are. If you found yourself with a roughly equal number of "true" and "false" answers, then you may be an ambivert—yes, there really is such a word.

But even if you answered every single question as an introvert or extrovert, that doesn't mean that your behavior is predictable across all circumstances. We can't say that every introvert is a bookworm or every extrovert wears lampshades at parties any more than we can say that every woman is a natural consensus-builder and every man loves contact sports. As Jung felicitously put it, "There is no such thing as a pure extrovert or a pure introvert. Such a man would be in the lunatic asylum."

This is partly because we are all gloriously complex individuals, but also because there are so many different *kinds* of introverts and extroverts. Introversion and extroversion interact with our other personality traits and personal histories, producing wildly different kinds of people. So if you're an artistic American guy whose father wished you'd try out for the football team like your rough-and-tumble brothers, you'll be a very different kind of introvert from, say, a Finnish businesswoman whose parents were lighthouse keepers. (Finland is a famously introverted nation. Finnish joke: How can you tell if a Finn likes you? He's staring at your shoes instead of his own.)

Many introverts are also "highly sensitive," which sounds poetic, but is actually a technical term in psychology. If you are a sensitive sort, then you're more apt than the average person to feel pleasantly overwhelmed by Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" or a well-turned phrase or an act of extraordinary kindness. You may be quicker than others to feel sickened by violence and ugliness, and you likely have a very strong conscience. When you were a child you were probably called "shy," and to this day feel

nervous when you're being evaluated, for example when giving a speech or on a first date. Later we'll examine why this seemingly unrelated collection of attributes tends to belong to the same person and why this person is often introverted. (No one knows exactly how many introverts are highly sensitive, but we know that 70 percent of sensitives are introverts, and the other 30 percent tend to report needing a lot of "down time.")

All of this complexity means that not everything you read in *Quiet* will apply to you, even if you consider yourself a true-blue introvert. For one thing, we'll spend some time talking about shyness and sensitivity, while you might have neither of these traits. That's OK. Take what applies to you, and use the rest to improve your relationships with others.

Having said all this, in *Quiet* we'll try not to get too hung up on definitions. Strictly defining terms is vital for researchers whose studies depend on pinpointing exactly where introversion stops and other traits, like shyness, start. But in *Quiet* we'll concern ourselves more with the *fruit* of that research. Today's psychologists, joined by neuroscientists with their brain-scanning machines, have unearthed illuminating insights that are changing the way we see the world—and ourselves. They are answering questions such as: Why are some people talkative while others measure their words? Why do some people burrow into their work and others organize office birthday parties? Why are some people comfortable wielding authority while others prefer neither to lead nor to be led? Can introverts be leaders? Is our cultural preference for extroversion in the natural order of things, or is it socially determined? From an evolutionary perspective, introversion must have survived as a personality trait for a reason—so what might the reason be? If you're an introvert, should you devote your energies to activities that come naturally, or should you stretch yourself, as Laura did that day at the negotiation table?

The answers might surprise you.

If there is only one insight you take away from this book, though, I hope it's a newfound sense of entitlement to be yourself. I can vouch personally for the life-transforming effects of this outlook. Remember that first client I told you about, the one I called Laura in order to protect her identity?

That was a story about me. I was my own first client.

WHEN SHOULD YOU ACT MORE EXTROVERTED
THAN YOU REALLY ARE?

A man has as many social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinion he cares. He generally shows a different side of himself to each of these different groups.

— WILLIAM JAMES

Meet Professor Brian Little, former Harvard University psychology lecturer and winner of the 3M Teaching Fellowship, sometimes referred to as the Nobel Prize of university teaching. Short, sturdy, bespectacled, and endearing, Professor Little has a booming baritone, a habit of breaking into song and twirling about onstage, and an old-school actor's way of emphasizing consonants and elongating vowels. He's been described as a cross between Robin Williams and Albert Einstein, and when he makes a joke that pleases his audience, which happens a lot, he looks even more delighted than they do. His classes at Harvard were always oversubscribed and often ended with standing ovations.

In contrast, the man I'm about to describe seems a very different breed: he lives with his wife in a tucked-away house on more than two acres of remote Canadian woods, visited occasionally by his children and grandchildren, but otherwise keeping to himself. He spends his free time scoring music, reading and writing books and articles, and e-mailing friends long notes he calls "e-pistles." When he does socialize, he favors one-on-one encounters. At parties, he pairs off into quiet conversations

as soon as he can or excuses himself “for a breath of fresh air.” When he’s forced to spend too much time out and about or in any situation involving conflict, he can literally become ill.

Would you be surprised if I told you that the vaudevillean professor and the recluse who prefers a life of the mind are one and the same man? Maybe not, when you consider that we all behave differently depending on the situation. But if we’re capable of such flexibility, does it even make sense to chart the differences between introverts and extroverts? Is the very notion of introversion-extroversion too pat a dichotomy: the introvert as sage philosopher, the extrovert as fearless leader? The introvert as poet or science nerd, the extrovert as jock or cheerleader? Aren’t we all a little of both?

Psychologists call this the “person-situation” debate: Do fixed personality traits really exist, or do they shift according to the situation in which people find themselves? If you talk to Professor Little, he’ll tell you that despite his public persona and his teaching accolades, he’s a true blue, off-the-charts introvert, not only behaviorally but also neurophysiologically (he took the lemon juice test I described in chapter 4 and salivated right on cue). This would seem to place him squarely on the “person” side of the debate: Little believes that personality traits exist, that they shape our lives in profound ways, that they’re based on physiological mechanisms, and that they’re relatively stable across a lifespan. Those who take this view stand on broad shoulders: Hippocrates, Milton, Schopenhauer, Jung, and more recently the prophets of fMRI machines and skin conductance tests.

On the other side of the debate are a group of psychologists known as the Situationists. Situationism posits that our generalizations about people, including the words we use to describe one another—shy, aggressive, conscientious, agreeable—are misleading. There is no core self; there are only the various selves of Situations X, Y, and Z. The Situationist view rose to prominence in 1968 when the psychologist Walter Mischel published *Personality and Assessment*, challenging the idea of fixed personality traits. Mischel argued that situational factors predict the behavior of people like Brian Little much better than supposed personality traits.

For the next few decades, Situationism prevailed. The postmodern view of self that emerged around this time, influenced by theorists like Erving Goffman, author of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, suggested that social life is performance and social masks are our true selves. Many researchers doubted whether personality traits even existed in any meaningful sense. Personality researchers had trouble finding jobs.

But just as the nature-nurture debate was replaced with interactionism—the insight that both factors contribute to who we are, and indeed influence each other—so has the person-situation debate been superseded by a more nuanced understanding. Personality psychologists acknowledge that we can feel sociable at 6:00 p.m. and solitary at 10:00 p.m., and that these fluctuations are real and situation-dependent. But they also emphasize how much evidence has emerged to support the premise that notwithstanding these variations, there truly is such a thing as a fixed personality.

These days, even Mischel admits that personality traits exist, but he believes they tend to occur in patterns. For example, some people are aggressive with peers and subordinates but docile with authority figures; others are just the opposite. People who are “rejection-sensitive” are warm and loving when they feel secure, hostile and controlling when they feel rejected.

But this comfortable compromise raises a variation on the problem of free will that we explored in chapter 5. We know that there are physiological limits on who we are and how we act. But should we attempt to manipulate our behavior within the range available to us, or should we simply be true to ourselves? At what point does controlling our behavior become futile, or exhausting?

If you’re an introvert in corporate America, should you try to save your true self for quiet weekends and spend your weekdays striving to “get out there, mix, speak more often, and connect with your team and others, deploying all the energy and personality you can muster,” as Jack Welch advised in a *BusinessWeek* online column? If you’re an extroverted university student, should you save your true self for rowdy weekends and spend your weekdays focusing and studying? Can people fine-tune their own personalities this way?

The only good answer I've heard to these questions comes from Professor Brian Little.

On the morning of October 12, 1979, Little visited the Royal Military College, Saint-Jean on the Richelieu River, forty kilometers south of Montreal, to address a group of senior military officers. As an introvert might be expected to do, he'd prepared thoroughly for the speech, not only rehearsing his remarks but also making sure he could cite the latest research. Even while delivering his talk, he was in what he calls classic introvert mode, continually scanning the room for audience displeasure and making adjustments as needed—a statistical reference here, a dollop of humor there.

The speech was a success (so much so that he would be invited to make it every year). But the next invitation the college extended horrified him: to join the top brass for lunch. Little had to deliver another lecture that afternoon, and he knew that making small talk for an hour and a half would wipe him out. He needed to recharge for his afternoon performance.

Thinking quickly, he announced that he had a passion for ship design and asked his hosts if he might instead take the opportunity of his visit to admire the boats passing by on the Richelieu River. He then spent his lunch hour strolling up and down the river pathway with an appreciative expression on his face.

For years Little returned to lecture at the college, and for years, at lunchtime, he walked the banks of the Richelieu River indulging his imaginary hobby—until the day the college moved its campus to a landlocked location. Stripped of his cover story, Professor Little resorted to the only escape hatch he could find—the men's room. After each lecture, he would race to the restroom and hide inside a stall. One time, a military man spotted Little's shoes under the door and began a hearty conversation, so Little took to keeping his feet propped up on the bathroom walls, where they would be hidden from view. (Taking shelter in

bathrooms is a surprisingly common phenomenon, as you probably know if you're an introvert. "After a talk, I'm in bathroom stall number nine," Little once told Peter Gzowski, one of Canada's most eminent talk-show hosts. "After a show, I'm in stall number eight," replied Gzowski, not missing a beat.)

You might wonder how a strong introvert like Professor Little manages to speak in public so effectively. The answer, he says, is simple, and it has to do with a new field of psychology that he created almost singlehandedly, called Free Trait Theory. Little believes that fixed traits and free traits coexist. According to Free Trait Theory, we are born and culturally endowed with certain personality traits—introversion, for example—but we can and do act out of character in the service of "core personal projects."

In other words, introverts are capable of acting like extroverts for the sake of work they consider important, people they love, or anything they value highly. Free Trait Theory explains why an introvert might throw his extroverted wife a surprise party or join the PTA at his daughter's school. It explains how it's possible for an extroverted scientist to behave with reserve in her laboratory, for an agreeable person to act hard-nosed during a business negotiation, and for a cantankerous uncle to treat his niece tenderly when he takes her out for ice cream. As these examples suggest, Free Trait Theory applies in many different contexts, but it's especially relevant for introverts living under the Extrovert Ideal.

According to Little, our lives are dramatically enhanced when we're involved in core personal projects that we consider meaningful, manageable, and not unduly stressful, and that are supported by others. When someone asks us "How are things?" we may give a throwaway answer, but our true response is a function of how well our core personal projects are going.

That's why Professor Little, the consummate introvert, lectures with such passion. Like a modern-day Socrates, he loves his students deeply; opening their minds and attending to their well-being are two of his core personal projects. When Little held office hours at Harvard, the students lined up in the hallway as if he were giving out free tickets to a rock concert. For more than twenty years his students asked him to write several hundred letters of recommendation *a year*. "Brian Little is the most engag-

ing, entertaining, and caring professor I have ever encountered," wrote one student about him. "I cannot even begin to explain the myriad ways in which he has positively affected my life." So, for Brian Little, the additional effort required to stretch his natural boundaries is justified by seeing his core personal project—igniting all those minds—come to fruition.

At first blush, Free Trait Theory seems to run counter to a cherished piece of our cultural heritage. Shakespeare's oft-quoted advice, "To thine own self be true," runs deep in our philosophical DNA. Many of us are uncomfortable with the idea of taking on a "false" persona for any length of time. And if we act out of character by convincing ourselves that our pseudo-self is real, we can eventually burn out without even knowing why. The genius of Little's theory is how neatly it resolves this discomfort. Yes, we are only pretending to be extroverts, and yes, such inauthenticity can be morally ambiguous (not to mention exhausting), but if it's in the service of love or a professional calling, then we're doing just as Shakespeare advised.

So if you *can* fake it, if you master the acting skills, the attention to social nuance, and the willingness to submit to social norms that self-monitoring requires, *should* you? The answer is that a Free Trait strategy can be effective when used judiciously, but disastrous if overdone.

Recently I spoke on a panel at Harvard Law School. The occasion was the fifty-fifth anniversary of women being admitted to the law school. Alumnae from all over the country gathered on campus to celebrate. The subject of the panel was "In a Different Voice: Strategies for Powerful Self-Presentation." There were four speakers: a trial lawyer, a judge, a public-speaking coach, and me. I'd prepared my remarks carefully; I knew the role I wanted to play.

The public-speaking coach went first. She talked about how to give a talk that knocks people's socks off. The judge, who happened to be Korean-American, spoke of how frustrating it is when people assume that all Asians are quiet and studious when in fact she's outgoing and assertive. The litigator, who was petite and blond and feisty as hell, talked

about the time she conducted a cross-examination only to be admonished by a judge to "Back down, tiger!"

When my turn came, I aimed my remarks at the women in the audience who didn't see themselves as tigers, myth-busters, or sock-knocker-offers. I said that the ability to negotiate is not inborn, like blond hair or straight teeth, and it does not belong exclusively to the table-pounders of the world. Anyone can be a great negotiator, I told them, and in fact it often pays to be quiet and gracious, to listen more than talk, and to have an instinct for harmony rather than conflict. With this style, you can take aggressive positions without inflaming your counterpart's ego. And by listening, you can learn what's truly motivating the person you're negotiating with and come up with creative solutions that satisfy both parties.

I also shared some psychological tricks for feeling calm and secure during intimidating situations, such as paying attention to how your face and body arrange themselves when you're feeling genuinely confident, and adopting those same positions when it comes time to fake it. Studies show that taking simple physical steps—like smiling—makes us feel stronger and happier, while frowning makes us feel worse.

Naturally, when the panel was over and the audience member came around to chat with the panelists, it was the introverts and pseudo-extroverts who sought me out. Two of those women stand out in my mind.

The first was Alison, a trial lawyer. Alison was slim and meticulously groomed, but her face was pale, pinched, and unhappy-looking. She'd been a litigator at the same corporate law firm for over a decade. Now she was applying for general counsel positions at various companies, which seemed a logical next step, except that her heart clearly wasn't in it. And sure enough, she hadn't gotten a single job offer. On the strength of her credentials, she was advancing to the final round of interviews, only to be weeded out at the last minute. And she knew why, because the headhunter who'd coordinated her interviews gave the same feedback each time: she lacked the right personality for the job. Alison, a self-described introvert, looked pained as she related this damning judgment.

The second alumna, Jillian, held a senior position at an environmental advocacy organization that she loved. Jillian came across as kind, cheerful, and down-to-earth. She was fortunate to spend much of her

time researching and writing policy papers on topics she cared about. Sometimes, though, she had to chair meetings and make presentations. Although she felt deep satisfaction after these meetings, she didn't enjoy the spotlight, and wanted my advice on staying cool when she felt scared.

So what was the difference between Alison and Jillian? Both were pseudo-extroverts, and you might say that Alison was trying and failing where Jillian was succeeding. But Alison's problem was actually that she was acting out of character in the service of a project she didn't care about. She didn't love the law. She'd chosen to become a Wall Street litigator because it seemed to her that this was what powerful and successful lawyers did, so her pseudo-extroversion was not supported by deeper values. She was not telling herself, *I'm doing this to advance work I care about deeply, and when the work is done I'll settle back into my true self.* Instead, her interior monologue was *The route to success is to be the sort of person I am not.* This is not self-monitoring; it is self-negation. Where Jillian acts out of character for the sake of worthy tasks that temporarily require a different orientation, Alison believes that there is something fundamentally wrong with who she is.

It's not always so easy, it turns out, to identify your core personal projects. And it can be especially tough for introverts, who have spent so much of their lives conforming to extroverted norms that by the time they choose a career, or a calling, it feels perfectly normal to ignore their own preferences. They may be uncomfortable in law school or nursing school or in the marketing department, but no more so than they were back in middle school or summer camp.

I, too, was once in this position. I enjoyed practicing corporate law, and for a while I convinced myself that I was an attorney at heart. I badly wanted to believe it, since I had already invested years in law school and on-the-job training, and much about Wall Street law was alluring. My colleagues were intellectual, kind, and considerate (mostly). I made a good living. I had an office on the forty-second floor of a skyscraper with views of the Statue of Liberty. I enjoyed the idea that I could flourish in such a high-powered environment. And I was pretty good at asking the "but" and "what if" questions that are central to the thought processes of most lawyers.

It took me almost a decade to understand that the law was never

my personal project, not even close. Today I can tell you unhesitatingly what is: my husband and sons; writing; promoting the values of this book. Once I realized this, I had to make a change. I look back on my years as a Wall Street lawyer as time spent in a foreign country. It was absorbing, it was exciting, and I got to meet a lot of interesting people whom I never would have known otherwise. But I was always an expatriate.

Having spent so much time navigating my own career transition and counseling others through theirs, I have found that there are three key steps to identifying your own core personal projects.

First, think back to what you loved to do when you were a child. How did you answer the question of what you wanted to be when you grew up? The specific answer you gave may have been off the mark, but the underlying impulse was not. If you wanted to be a fireman, what did a fireman mean to you? A good man who rescued people in distress? A daredevil? Or the simple pleasure of operating a truck? If you wanted to be a dancer, was it because you got to wear a costume, or because you craved applause, or was it the pure joy of twirling around at lightning speed? You may have known more about who you were then than you do now.

Second, pay attention to the work you gravitate to. At my law firm I never once volunteered to take on an extra corporate legal assignment, but I did spend a lot of time doing pro bono work for a nonprofit women's leadership organization. I also sat on several law firm committees dedicated to mentoring, training, and personal development for young lawyers in the firm. Now, as you can probably tell from this book, I am not the committee type. But the goals of those committees lit me up, so that's what I did.

Finally, pay attention to what you envy. Jealousy is an ugly emotion, but it tells the truth. You mostly envy those who have what you desire. I met my own envy after some of my former law school classmates got together and compared notes on alumni career tracks. They spoke with admiration and, yes, jealousy, of a classmate who argued regularly before the Supreme Court. At first I felt critical. More power to that classmate! I thought, congratulating myself on my magnanimity. Then I realized that my largesse came cheap, because I didn't aspire to argue a case before the Supreme Court, or to any of the other accolades of lawyering. When I asked myself whom I *did* envy, the answer came back instantly.

My college classmates who'd grown up to be writers or psychologists. Today I'm pursuing my own version of both those roles.



But even if you're stretching yourself in the service of a core personal project, you don't want to act out of character too much, or for too long. Remember those trips Professor Little made to the restroom in between speeches? Those hideout sessions tell us that, paradoxically, the best way to act out of character is to stay as true to yourself as you possibly can—starting by creating as many “restorative niches” as possible in your daily life.

“Restorative niche” is Professor Little's term for the place you go when you want to return to your true self. It can be a physical place, like the path beside the Richelieu River, or a temporal one, like the quiet breaks you plan between sales calls. It can mean canceling your social plans on the weekend before a big meeting at work, practicing yoga or meditation, or choosing e-mail over an in-person meeting. (Even Victorian ladies, whose job effectively was to be available to friends and family, were expected to withdraw for a rest each afternoon.)

You choose a restorative niche when you close the door to your private office (if you're lucky enough to have one) in between meetings. You can even create a restorative niche *during* a meeting, by carefully selecting where you sit, and when and how you participate. In his memoir *In an Uncertain World*, Robert Rubin, the treasury secretary under President Clinton, describes how he “always liked to be away from the center, whether in the Oval Office or the chief of staff's office, where my regular seat became the foot of the table. That little bit of physical distance felt more comfortable to me, and let me read the room and comment from a perspective ever so slightly removed. I didn't worry about being overlooked. No matter how far away you were sitting or standing, you could always just say, ‘Mr. President, I think this, that, or the other.’”

We would all be better off if, before accepting a new job, we evaluated the presence or absence of restorative niches as carefully as we consider the family leave policy or health insurance plans. Introverts should

ask themselves: Will this job allow me to spend time on in-character activities like, for example, reading, strategizing, writing, and researching? Will I have a private workspace or be subject to the constant demands of an open office plan? If the job doesn't give me enough restorative niches, will I have enough free time on evenings and weekends to grant them to myself?

Extroverts will want to look for restorative niches, too. Does the job involve talking, traveling, and meeting new people? Is the office space stimulating enough? If the job isn't a perfect fit, are the hours flexible enough that I can blow off steam after work? Think through the job description carefully. One highly extroverted woman I interviewed was excited about a position as the "community organizer" for a parenting website, until she realized that she'd be sitting by herself behind a computer every day from nine to five.

Sometimes people find restorative niches in professions where you'd least expect them. One of my former colleagues is a trial lawyer who spends most of her time in splendid solitude, researching and writing legal briefs. Because most of her cases settle, she goes to court rarely enough that she doesn't mind exercising her pseudo-extroversion skills when she has to. An introverted administrative assistant I interviewed parlayed her office experience into a work-from-home Internet business that serves as a clearinghouse and coaching service for "virtual assistants." And in the next chapter we'll meet a superstar salesman who broke his company's sales records year after year by insisting on staying true to his introverted self. All three of these people have taken decidedly extroverted fields and reinvented them in their own image, so that they're acting in character most of the time, effectively turning their workdays into one giant restorative niche.

Finding restorative niches isn't always easy. You might want to read quietly by the fire on Saturday nights, but if your spouse wishes you'd spend those evenings out with her large circle of friends, then what? You might want to retreat to the oasis of your private office in between sales calls, but what if your company just switched over to an open office plan? If you plan to exercise free traits, you'll need the help of friends, family, and colleagues. Which is why Professor Little calls, with great passion, for each of us to enter into "a Free Trait Agreement."

This is the final piece of Free Trait Theory. A Free Trait Agreement acknowledges that we'll each act out of character some of the time—in exchange for being ourselves the rest of the time. It's a Free Trait Agreement when a wife who wants to go out every Saturday night and a husband who wants to relax by the fire work out a schedule: *half the time we'll go out, and half the time we'll stay home*. It's a Free Trait Agreement when you attend your extroverted best friend's wedding shower, engagement celebration, and bachelorette party, but she understands when you skip out on the three days' worth of group activities leading up to the wedding itself.

It's often possible to negotiate Free Trait Agreements with friends and lovers, whom you want to please and who love your true, in-character self. Your work life is a little trickier, since most businesses still don't think in these terms. For now, you may have to proceed indirectly. Career counselor Shoya Zichy told me the story of one of her clients, an introverted financial analyst who worked in an environment where she was either presenting to clients or talking to colleagues who continually cycled in and out of her office. She was so burned out that she planned to quit her job—until Zichy suggested that she negotiate for downtime.

Now, this woman worked for a Wall Street bank, not a culture conducive to a frank discussion about the needs of the highly introverted. So she carefully considered how to frame her request. She told her boss that the very nature of her work—strategic analysis—required quiet time in which to concentrate. Once she made her case empirically, it was easier to ask for what she needed psychologically: two days a week of working from home. Her boss said yes.

But the person with whom you can best strike a Free Trait Agreement—after overcoming his or her resistance—is yourself.

Let's say you're single. You dislike the bar scene, but you crave intimacy, and you want to be in a long-term relationship in which you can share cozy evenings and long conversations with your partner and a small circle of friends. In order to achieve this goal, you make an agreement with yourself that you will push yourself to go to social events, because only in this way can you hope to meet a mate and reduce the number of gatherings you attend over the long term. But while you pursue this goal, you will attend only as many events as you can comfortably stand. You decide in advance what that amount is—once a week, once a month,

once a quarter. And once you've met your quota, you've earned the right to stay home without feeling guilty.

Or perhaps you've always dreamed of building your own small company, working from home so you can spend more time with your spouse and children. You know you'll need to do a certain amount of networking, so you make the following Free Trait Agreement with yourself: you will go to one schmooze-fest per week. At each event you will have at least one genuine conversation (since this comes easier to you than "working the room") and follow up with that person the next day. After that, you get to go home and not feel bad when you turn down other networking opportunities that come your way.