

Bridging The Communication Gap Between Introverts and Extroverts by Peter Moen

Here's a personal story.

I had gone through a number of interviews with the staff of the Training Department of a large financial services firm. Everyone seemed to be happy with my technical experience, and to enjoy me personally. But no job offer had been extended. I was then asked to meet with a retired senior executive. After just 5-6 minutes, he raised his hand to halt the proceedings, and said 'You're fine. You just organize your thoughts before responding to questions - that's all.' It was only then that I found out that although everyone I had previously interviewed with was positive about me, they (all of whom were probably Extroverts) were uncomfortable with the 'slight' pauses before I responded to questions. This incident was probably the first point in my life that I came to understand the 'communications gap' between Extraverts and Introverts.

The concepts of Extraversion and Introversion were first used by C. G. Jung in the 1920's. They were later popularized when they were incorporated into the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator(r) (MBTI), by Katharine Briggs and Isabel Myers in the 40's.

Two succinct definitions for these fundamental orientations are:

Extraverts are people who are outwardly focused on people, things and action. They are energized by what goes on in the outer world.

Introverts are people who are inwardly focused on concepts, feelings and ideas. They are energized by what goes on in their inner world.

Although all people, can, and do sometimes behave in both extraverting and introverting manners, each of us has a character-based preference for one form of orientation or the other.

There are a fairly large number of typical behaviors that can be said to differentiate Extraverts from Introverts. Here are two partial lists:

EXTRAVERTS

- Get Energized by Being With Others
- Talk to Sort Through Ideas and Feelings
- Act Then (Maybe) Reflect
- Take the Initiative When Making Contact
- Are Gregarious
- Usually Communicate Freely About Themselves
- Have a Wide Range of Interests and Relationships

INTROVERTS

- Need Time Alone
- Need to First Internalize Ideas and Feelings
- Reflect Then (Perhaps) Act
- Let Others Initiate Contact
- Have a Few Deep Friendships
- Communicate Freely About Themselves With Those They Trust
- Have Depth to Their Interests

These two orientations manifest themselves in these typical communication preferences of Extraverts and Introverts.

Extraverts

- Prefer to organize and refine ideas through the process of communicating them
- Prefer to communicate face-to-face or over the telephone
- Prefer to spontaneously move from item to item
- Prefer to get the input of as many people as possible on most issues

Introverts

- Prefer to think over issues and ideas before discussing them
- Prefer to communicate in writing, using electronic messages, or in structured verbal exchanges.
- Prefer to discuss fewer issues and in more depth.
- Prefer sequential one-on-one conversations to meetings and group brainstorming.

The most powerful strategy for relating to others who are different from you is to increase your awareness of these personality-based differences, and modify your behavior to be more like the preferred mode of others.

Here are examples for Introverts relating to Extraverts:

1. When faced with `on-the-fly` proposals, give as much of an immediate response as possible, and then tell the other person when and how you will respond in full.
2. Consciously plan your contributions in meetings to take place at earlier points when your energy will be higher.
3. When the consequences of a joint-decision may be important, take the initiative to let others know that communication is needed.

Here are examples for Extraverts relating to Introverts:

1. When you need to discuss a large number of issues, create an agenda (supply it ahead of time), or arrange for multiple conversations.
2. Resist your urge to fill-in those small gaps in a conversation with an Introvert.
3. Provide notes, electronic messages or memos to track your new and changed ideas between meetings.

If you experience continuing problems communicating with someone, consider if differences in Extraversion and Introversion might be the obstacle. And if so, try using the ideas in this article.

Keywords

MBTI, introvert, extravert, communication, diversity

Published on: 5/28/2002