



Susan Cain

The Power of Introverts

Parenting Quiet Kids in a Noisy World

November 14, 2013

Picture the scene: you (or your child), age 9, headed to summer camp for the first time. Packed in the duffel bag, along with the hiking boots and mosquito spray, is a collection of books. Of course, you think, there will be some downtime in between activities where you will be able to curl up and enjoy a book.

As you unpack, your counselor erupts into the room. "Attention, campers!!" she roars enthusiastically. "I need to teach you the cheer that we will be chanting every day...R,O,W,D,I,E! That's the way you spell rowdie!!! – Rowdie! Rowdie! Let's get ROWDIE!!! Whoo-hoo!!" Needless to say, in order to fit in, the books stay in the duffel bag all summer, and you (or your child) put your most 'rowdy'-self forward.

Susan Cain, a self-described introvert, used that story to introduce her talk to the Common Ground audience. Cain was that 9 year-old at camp with the books shoved under her bunk all summer. Her biggest questions about that experience (which she never asked aloud) were: "Why do we need to be rowdy all the time?" And, moreover, "Why are we spelling rowdy incorrectly?"

If you are like Susan Cain, or the other one third to one half of the population who are introverted, that scene, or a similar one, plays out in your life all the time. You find yourself constantly trying to be more of an extrovert in order to prove something to yourself, and perhaps, to others. Cain describes her life path as a continuous attempt to become less introverted, even working as a lawyer on Wall Street. "I finally came to believe that it was a mistake," shared Cain. "It's a mistake to be someone that you're not." Cain believes that our larger society is making three mistakes:

- PEOPLE – we are not making the most of introverts' hearts and minds as they are feeling that the way they choose to spend their time is wrong;
- CREATIVITY – solitude matters - we have lost sight of the transcendent value of silence; and
- LEADERSHIP – the most charismatic person is not necessarily the best leader.

Cain's book, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, is a *New York Times* bestseller that has been translated into over 30 languages. Her 2012 TED Talk on the same topic, has been viewed over 5 million times and was named by Bill Gates as one of his all-time favorites. You can watch that TED Talk here: http://www.ted.com/talks/susan_cain_the_power_of_introverts.html

In the two years since her TED Talk, Cain has been working on a revolution – a Quiet Revolution. According to Cain, introversion is the big new diversity issue of our time – we already acknowledge gender and racial diversity – now we need equality for the quiet among us. The good news, according to Cain, is that her revolution does not take a lot of time or money – it simply takes the time to think about what it means to be quiet. In her book, Cain sets forth a personality test so you can determine whether you are more of an introvert or an extrovert. In the meantime, ask yourself the following question: How do you feel after two hours at a large party? While extroverts are just hitting their stride at 10pm, the introverts at the party are ready to go home. Introversion is a question of where you get your energy – extroverts get energy from being out with people and introverts feel at their best when they are in a less-stimulating environment. Interestingly, introverts react more strongly to stimulation of all kinds. When introverts put a lemon wedge on their tongues, they will salivate more than the extroverts. Moreover, neurobiologists discovered that the reward-networks in the brains of extroverts are more easily engaged than in introverts. (By the way, those people who fall somewhere between the extremes are called ambiverts).

Biologists have discovered that there are introverts and extroverts in almost every species in the animal kingdom. Even amongst fruit flies, there are sitters (introverts) and rovers (extroverts), and both have different survival mechanisms. Similar to the animal kingdom, our species needs both personality styles in order to flourish. One famous introvert, Albert Einstein, claimed, "It is not that I am so smart – I just stay with problems longer." Another introvert, Warren Buffett, when describing his process as an investor, likens himself to an artist lying on his back painting the Sistine Chapel. Buffett works well with others, but

is best known for sitting alone in his office for hours analyzing a financial document. Wendy Kopp, the introverted founder of Teach For America, understood from a very early age that she was not going to be a leader by galvanizing others; rather, she was going lead with ideas and grit. Our culture and communities need to start celebrating the qualities that introverts exhibit – seriousness of purpose and passionate dedication to a single issue.

As Einstein pointed out, introverts are known for staying with a problem longer than extroverts. In his book, *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell introduced the “10,000-Hour Rule” claiming that the key to success in any field is, to a large extent, a matter of practicing a specific task for a total of around 10,000 hours. While introverts may not be intentionally gunning for that 10,000 hour number, they tend to reach it due to the passion and intensity they apply to their interests. As a result, many introverts find themselves in leadership positions – despite the discomfort that the position entails. In his book, *Good To Great*, management expert James Collins describes how companies transition from being average to great. Greatness is defined as financial performance several multiples better than the market average over a sustained period. Collins lays out seven characteristics of great companies; one of which is Level 5 Leadership. Level 5 Leaders have two characteristics: (1) they are passionate about, and driven to do, what is best for the company; and (2) they are described as being unassuming, modest and soft-spoken. In other words, most of these Level 5 Leaders are introverts.

While writing her book, Susan Cain toured the country visiting classrooms and businesses. She found that our culture is naturally aligned with the extroverts among us. Educational life is now taught in group processes – the theory being that group work gets everyone engaged. However, the reality of group projects is that some of the kids are truly engaged, some are disengaged, and some end up talking about last night’s TV shows. Moreover, schools are ignoring the human tendency to conform to group opinion.

The same can be said for the new workplace of community desks and wide-open spaces. In fact, Pixar designed its headquarters with the building’s only restrooms located in the lobby. The goal was to get employees out and walking around so they could surreptitiously bump into each other and exchange ideas. These types of environments may foster impromptu brainstorming sessions, however, forty years of researching on brainstorming concludes that it does not work. Organizational psychologist, Adrian Furnham, author of more than 700 scientific papers and 57 books, concludes that brainstorming is good only for building group cohesion. Instead, people who go off and think by themselves generate more and better ideas. Solitude is important for the creative process. Even extroverts need to learn to find that solitude and then to rejoin the group to listen to everyone’s opinions. We need to develop schools and workplaces that celebrate both the yin and the yang of personality types. Good leadership is too big for any one person or personality type. An example is the success of Facebook’s team of introverted Mark Zuckerberg and extroverted Sheryl Sandberg.

Susan Cain’s THREE tips for Introverts –

1. Schedule solo time AND walk-arounds (the time you are out chatting with people);
2. Prepare for meetings, and speak up early – when you get into group situations, give yourself a push to contribute early on – you’ll feel more emotionally anchored; and
3. Express enthusiasm outwardly – remember to demonstrate how you feel inside.

Susan Cain’s THREE tips for Extroverts –

1. Engage introverts 1-on-1 and give them advance notice to prepare for meetings;
2. In conflict situations, be aware of different personality styles – try to turn down your drama; and
3. Ride your enthusiasm, but remember to look before you leap, as studies show that it is the extroverts who get into car accidents more often, and take larger financial risks, etc.

Susan Cain’s *12 Tips for Raising a Quietly Strong Child* are available at: <http://goo.gl/9PrAcW>. To follow Cain’s Quiet Revolution, text the following info to 411247: ‘quiet, your first name, your email address’

Advice and stories for introverts and extroverts alike on how to appreciate our quiet sides. Featuring essays, videos, interviews, and more. We so love your upcoming book, No Hard Feelings: The Secret Power of Embracing Emotion at Work! Can you tell us more about it? [Read more >](#). QUIET REVOLUTIONARIES: Life in the Quiet Box. [READ MORE](#). [Work](#).