

PLUS: THE FULLY
ILLUSTRATED STORY OF
LOYAL BIRD
★
AN UNLIKELY REVOLUTIONIST



THE INTROVERT REVOLUTION

A Quiet Path to Reclaiming Our Power

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The Introvert Revolution

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***“A revolutionist is one who desires to discard the
existing social order and try another.”***

~John Tanner

The Revolutionist's Handbook and Pocket Companion

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Preface: The Dreamers

On August 28th, 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. uttered four words that the world will never forget: “I have a dream.” He didn’t say that he had a plan of action or a five-step outline for success. With sincere emotion and unwavering conviction, Martin Luther King told the world that he had a dream.

King’s speech is widely considered the best American speech of the 20th century. Although it had several components, the “I have a dream” section most deeply resonated with listeners. The 250,000 plus supporters that heard King’s address could identify with his message because they, too, had a dream.

Like King and his supporters, introverts are dreamers. We spend a great deal of our time inhabiting the realm of thoughts, ideas and fantasies. We are the ones who are often in our heads. We find pleasure and refuge in our imagination. This habit of constantly thinking elicits criticism from others. “Get your head out of the clouds,” they tell us. “Live in the moment,” they say.

But to dream is to live. Our world is created first with our thoughts. Introverts might be quiet, but our mind is alive. We are small, but our imagination reaches the sky.

To dream is to harness the mystical powers of creativity. Letting our mind wonder gives the subconscious time to make connections and find solutions. It is for this reason that Woody Allen comes up with his best ideas in the shower. It is why some of the greatest writers of our time use exercise as part of their creative process. When we give ourselves freedom to daydream, we give wings to our best ideas.

To dream is to touch upon something bigger than us. We grasp onto the edges of a collective vision that is catapulting the world toward a new direction. We see our secret dreams embodied by others who share our cause. With them, we are

carried forward by the prospect of a better tomorrow.

As introverts, our dream is simple; we have a dream that we will be able to keep dreaming.

Without fear of judgment, criticism or sideways glances, we want to continue exploring our imagination. We want to close the door. We want to nightdream *and* daydream. We want to dive deep into our own thoughts and explore the universe inside our head.

And when we come up for air, we want to share our dreams with the world. But instead of listening, society bombards us with the message that we need to change. It tears us from our thoughts, and drowns out our dreams with the sound of popular opinion.

So, we continue to dream that the world will let us dream ...

In this ebook, we will explore how introverts can reclaim our right to dream. We will peel back the mask of extroversion and discover the hidden treasures of our true personality. Instead of trying to fit in, we will reshape our world to fit us. We will quietly revolutionize the way we see ourselves and invite others to follow suit.

Before we embark on the path toward reclaiming our power, I'd like to take a moment to share a story about a little bird that quietly revolutionized his world.

Loyal Bird

An Unlikely Revolutionist

Written By [Michaela Chung](#)

Illustrated By [Lala Hernández](#)



There once lived a little bird named Loyal Bird. Loyal Bird was different than other birds. While most birds loved to spend their days flying and singing, Loyal Bird preferred doing other things.



Loyal bird loved swimming. He liked how the water tickled his feathers as he sloshed about. He enjoyed plunging deep into the ocean where he could search for hidden treasures. Underwater, he found a whole other world that most birds never see.



Swimming wasn't Loyal Bird's only hobby. He also liked to bake. He baked pies, cupcakes, cookies and crumbles. Most of all, Loyal Bird loved baking cakes – but not just any kind of cake – he made very very tall cakes. Some cakes were so tall they reached the sky.



When he wasn't swimming or baking, Loyal Bird could be found with his beak buried in a dictionary. Loyal Bird was a collector of old dictionaries. One of his favorite pastimes was learning new old words. He liked to pretend that he was a king from a past century.



With the help of his old dictionaries, he made grand speeches to his people.

Loyal Bird was, of course, very loyal. He spent a lot of time with his best friend, Honest Bear.



The other birds thought it was strange for a bear and a bird to be friends. This didn't bother Loyal Bird much because he cared very little about what the other birds thought of him.

But the other birds wouldn't let him be. They wanted Loyal Bird to be like them. They told him that birds aren't meant to read old dictionaries and bake very tall cakes. And they most certainly shouldn't swim.

"Birds are not supposed to swim," they scolded. "Birds must fly! You must fly!" they insisted. No matter how much Loyal Bird tried to ignore them, the other birds kept telling him he had to fly. When he asked them why, their reply was always the same: "Because that's what birds do. They fly."

Loyal Bird knew that the other birds would not leave him alone until he flew.



So, he did.



The End

Introduction: The Quiet Introvert Revolution

1. THE WEIGHT OF THE EXTROVERT IDEAL

In recent years, there has been more and more talk about introversion. Several articles, websites, YouTube videos and books about introverts have surfaced. On the Internet, especially, we have been uncharacteristically noisy about our quiet nature. Introverts from around the world are flocking to introvert Facebook pages, blogs and forums to join the quiet introvert uprising.

So, what's all the fuss about? What makes us so keen to share every introvert-related article, meme and tweet we can find? Why have books, like *Susan Cain's Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking* struck such a cord with so many of us? And why does any of it matter?

Unfortunately, many introverts spend a great deal of our lives (sometimes our entire life) feeling like there is something wrong with us. It's no wonder that we feel this way.

Being inward focused is not 'in'. Our extroverted counterparts cannot comprehend why we would want – need – to be alone when there are parties to attend and towns to paint red. The world wants us to go out and to be outgoing. If we don't, we are labeled, categorized and stamped with stereotypes that are never flattering and almost always untrue.

It is often implied or said outright that our introverted nature is not acceptable. As Criss Jami, author of *Venus in Arms*, puts it:

“In an extroverted society, the difference between an introvert and

an extrovert is that an introvert is often unconsciously deemed guilty until proven innocent.”

From childhood, we hear adults offer excuses for our behaviour. “Don’t mind her, she’s just shy,” they say apologetically. In high school we are presumed antisocial or weird because of our quietness. By the time we reach adulthood, we’ve heard others describe us as snobby, aloof and shallow countless times.

Some of us are deemed depressed or angry because of our introverted nature. The desire for solitude is no longer an acceptable excuse for leaving the crowd. One has to have a concrete reason (homework, a hangover, death in the family) to seek out silence. If we can’t come up with a legitimate explanation for our behavior, others create one for us. “Poor girl, she must be depressed,” they whisper.

This causes introverts to feel guilty about our quiet nature. We worry that we’re breaking the unwritten rules that are largely designed by and for extroverts. We nervously teeter across the invisible line between fulfilling our needs and disappointing others.

We think that we’re somehow failing ourselves and the world by not talking enough; not going out as often as we should; not staying until the end of the party; and not enjoying the hyped up activities that others get a buzz from.

In short, we feel bad for not being extroverted enough.

I remember feeling this way throughout my teens and early twenties. Then one day, I took a personality test for a college

psychology class. This is when I discovered that I am introverted. I was astounded to learn that there are millions of people like me. This moment completely changed my view of myself.

Until then, I didn't understand what introversion was. Learning the traits of an introvert made me realize that there was not something terribly wrong with me. All those little things that I saw as deficiencies are actually traits that most introverts share. Suddenly, I wasn't a freak or a bad person. The missing piece of the puzzle had been found. I was an introvert. This seemingly insignificant revelation changed my life.

I can remember walking a little taller that day. I smiled at strangers, not because I thought I should, but because I felt happy. Somehow, knowing I was an introvert gave me a sense of vindication. I am certain many other introverts have felt similarly justified simply by understanding their introversion.

Now that we understand ourselves, introverts want the whole world to follow suit. We want everyone to accept us for who we are and to stop trying to change us into something we are not.

2. THE POWER OF INTROVERTS AND OTHER OUTLIERS

Society needs introverts and extroverts just like it needs dreamers and realists. The world is comprised of an intricate mosaic of drastically different personalities. Our differences weave us together while also creating diversity. If we were all the same, the world would be robbed of both beauty and functionality.

Our culture is defined as much by free-spirited artists as it is by

straight-laced lawyers. Every piece of the puzzle is needed to create a complete picture. Unfortunately, a lot of people don't recognize this fundamental truth. They are so preoccupied with our differences that they fail to see that different can be beautiful, inspiring, and incredibly valuable.

Introverts, along with the other outliers of society, are often thought of as less significant because we are different. We don't fit into the narrow definition of what is considered normal. Thus, we are pushed to the edges of society, where it's lonely and desolate. Except, really it's not.

The edges are where the real story is observed and told. It is where truth and beauty and connectedness form. In practical terms, the fringes of our culture are where insight and mastery occur.

From a distance, we can see the world objectively. Just as a satellite views more from outer space, introverts are able to observe more from the fringes. The greatest thinkers of all time set themselves apart from the rest of society. Aristotle, Gandhi, Einstein, Picasso and Hemingway all inhabited the edges of our culture.

Not only could they see more when distanced from the crowd – they also understood more. In quietness they could hear the subtle messages spoken between words. They were able to turn over ideas in their mind until they were fully baked and ready to be delivered into the world. Thanks to insightful outsiders, we have abstract art and the theory of relativity. Because one man knew the power of standing alone, the entire country of India gained its independence.

Together, outliers form a powerful segment of society. People take

for granted the power of introverts, just like they underestimate the strength of every outsider, misfit and outcast. You see, ‘normal’ people are actually not the majority. They are a noisy minority that overestimates their own significance. There are more geeks than jocks; more poor than rich; more workers than bosses; more freaks than cool kids ... you get the idea.

I am not a Lady Gaga fan, but she is a great example of the power of outliers. She represents strangeness. She champions fitting out. She is the mother of millions of “little monsters” who also feel like they don’t belong. She and her fans exemplify the massive influence that fringe dwellers have on our culture.

Sometimes, being an outlier has to do with oppression. The story of a few elitists segregating and annihilating people en masse has been repeating itself for centuries. But a funny thing happens when a small portion of the population oppresses the masses. The downcast rise up. The silenced speak out. The oppressed join forces and raise hell. With the support of other fed-up outliers, they demand what every human being deserves: respect, acceptance, and freedom. Thus, a revolution is born.

3. SHARING OUR MESSAGE ONE CLICK AT A TIME

At this very moment, introverts are experiencing our own sort of revolution. We are recognizing that we are not alone. There are countless others who have also felt the weight of the extrovert ideal bearing down on their shoulders. Like us, they have had enough. They are tired of feeling defective. They are sick of being saddled with guilt. They are fed up with people trying to change them.

United, the quiet voices of introverts have been amplified. And the world is finally starting to listen. The medium may vary, but our overall message is the same; we want to be understood, accepted and appreciated for who we are.

Nowhere is the introvert revolution more evident than online. Lately, introvert articles have been spreading like wildfire across the Web. Some extroverts have voiced their frustration over the explosion of introvert listicles. They've heard enough about introversion. They're tired of us forcing them to see our perspective (only we're not really because they can easily click away).

For a very short period of time, extroverts have been feeling what we've felt our whole lives: bogged down by the opinions of a noisy few. Sorry, irate extroverts who can't handle one more introvert listicle – you'll find no sympathy here. Introverts are merely telling the world that we are not inferior. We are setting boundaries, claiming acceptance and defining our terms

TERMS OF THE INTROVERT REVOLUTION

We will not allow people to continue making us feel like there is something wrong with us.

We will not deny who we are.

We will not feel guilty about our innate needs and desires.

We will no longer accept the extrovert ideal as a superior standard.

We will not see the need to be alone as a social handicap.

We will live our lives as we see fit, not as others tell us we should.

We will use social media, books, and online forums as a means of spreading our message.

We will not apologize for being quiet.

We will not feel bad for hating small talk.

We reserve the right to let our phone go to voice mail 80% of the time (we'll call back later ... maybe).

4. PICKING UP THE PIECES AND ALTERING PERCEPTIONS

The introvert revolution is changing the world by transforming people's perceptions. As individuals, the first step to having an impact is to alter our own perceptions.

Before we can gain acceptance from others, we must first accept ourselves. Introverts have many diverse gifts to offer the world. Unfortunately, the overpowering voices of a few closed-minded people have shaken our confidence.

They told us there was something wrong with us. We believed them. Now we are left to pick up the pieces of our broken and distorted self-image. We face the difficult task of unearthing our true nature and then wearing it proudly.

Chapter 1: A Whosa-whatsa-vert?

1. INTROVERT MYTHS, TRUTHS AND TRAITS

Despite the recent surge in books, websites and articles about this topic, a lot of people still have no clue what introversion is. Or worse, they have bought into unflattering introvert stereotypes.

There is an avalanche of misconceptions about introverts. Many misguided souls still believe that all introverts are shy, antisocial weirdos who don't know how to interact with other humans. They think that we are unadventurous and boring. Some people even envision us as pale, grimacing hermits who never leave the house.

In reality, none of the above qualities are defining characteristics of an introvert. We are not all wart-covered warlocks or forest-dwelling hobbits. Introverts can be as lovely, likeable and flawed as extroverts.

The defining characteristic of introverts is that we draw energy from being alone. Social interactions and overly stimulating environments drain us.

While extroverts require lots of outward stimulation to feel content, introverts prefer to limit outside stimuli in favor of more inward focused activities. We thrive on deep thought and reflection. What's going on in our own heads is often more appealing than the raucous atmosphere of the surrounding world.

Extroverts, on the other hand, become bored by too much solitude. They crave high levels of social interaction. They are drawn to

environments that wake up their senses. For extroverts, more noise, more people and more hype often equals more fun.

While extroverts perpetuate the culture of more, introverts crave less. We practice word economy in a society suffering from verbal diarrhea. We prefer intense focus over constant distraction. We embrace singletasking in a world obsessed with multitasking.

Because introverts are tentative about interacting with people, we are often labeled as shy. Many people mistakenly believe shyness is a synonym for introversion (much to the chagrin of confident introverts). Both introverts and extroverts can be shy.

Shyness involves a fear of social interactions. Often, shy people would like to join the crowd, but lack the courage to do so. Introverts, in contrast, avoid social interactions because they deplete our energy. We want and need to be alone in order to restore ourselves.

Although introverts comprise 25-50% of the population, we often seem like a minority. The old saying, “he who shouts the loudest can only hear his own voice”, rings true. The more gregarious half of society overshadows the quieter portion.

Another reason why introverts seem like a rarity is that we often disguise ourselves as extroverts. Many of us have become quite skilled at the art of pseudo-extroversion. Introverts act out of character because we feel that society has deemed our quiet nature unacceptable. We also might enjoy the benefits of acting extroverted, which can include popularity, status and more job opportunities.

Because introversion and extroversion exist on a spectrum, most of us embody characteristics from both personality types. There are, however, a few core traits that are shared by the majority of introverts.

Most introverts are agitated by crowds. Packed nightclubs leave us feeling exhausted and irritable. Bustling amusement parks overwhelm us. A party teeming with strangers can feel more like a threatening inferno than an inviting atmosphere. Even visiting a busy grocery store can have a draining effect on introverts.

This is not to say that introverts don't like people or social activities. We can enjoy all the same things as extroverts, but we do so in our own introverted way. Introverts can go to parties. We can mix and mingle and meet new people. Our approach, however, will be different from that of an extrovert.

Introverts usually hang out along the edges of a room. We avoid large clusters of people in favor of one-on-one conversation. Rather than 'working the room', an introvert is likely to spend the bulk of the evening talking to one or two people. We often appear deeply focused on the conversation, as if there were no one else in the room.

I know a lot of introverts, myself included, who would rather host a party than attend someone else's. Hosting duties give us an excuse to escape the group when needed. Introverts might also coordinate activities and clubs as a way of connecting with people on our own terms.

Another common introvert trait is that we dislike talking on the

phone. Because we express ourselves better in writing, text messaging and email are more appealing than talking on the telephone.

Introverts also tend to hate small talk. Whether you call it chit-chat, banter or chatter, small talk is an introvert's kryptonite. We try to avoid this social pleasantries because we find it inherently unpleasant. We'd rather dive deep and explore feelings and ideas than indulge in fluffy banter.

Another reason why introverts dislike small talk is because we need time to think before we speak. We like conversing, but not necessarily in the manner that extroverts favor. Unlike extroverts, who flit quickly from topic to topic, introverts prefer slower-paced conversation. We like to explore a few interesting topics deeply. While we often dread small talk, we can talk at length about our ideas, dreams and passions.

All of the above are common introvert traits. But what is it exactly that causes introverts to behave the way we do? What shapes our needs and desires? To answer that, we should first discuss whether or not introversion is a product of nature or nurture.

2. IS THERE A BIOLOGICAL BASIS FOR INTROVERTED BEHAVIOR?

A study by American psychologist, Jerome Kagan, linked introversion to high reactivity in infancy.¹ Four-month old babies

¹ Jerome Kagan and Nancy Snidman, *The Long Shadow of Temperament* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

were subjected to various forms of stimuli, including new sounds, faces and objects. Babies who reacted dramatically to the new stimuli (crying, thrashing limbs, etc.) were defined as 'high reactive'.

High reactive babies were found to have over-active amygdalas. The amygdala is the emotional center where the brain triggers the adrenalin response to danger. In short, the high reactive infants were easily over-stimulated. They later became quiet, careful teenagers – introverts.

Kagan's study shows that the nervous system shapes personality. It suggests that introversion is present from infancy. Other studies of identical twins also indicate that introversion has a genetic basis.

Recently I unintentionally performed my own sort of twins experiment. The results reinforced a lot of what I already knew about introversion. While living in Mexico City, I shared an apartment with 18-year old fraternal twins and their mother. I was able to live with them for free in exchange for teaching the twins (who were brother and sister) English.

When I first arrived at the house, I met the mother and daughter. The daughter, an obvious extrovert, was very enthusiastic about learning English. She didn't seem at all shy about practicing with me. Both she and her mother said that the brother was very quiet. They described him as an artist who liked to spend most of his time alone. I was warned that, although he knew more English than his sister, he was very reluctant to speak. Of course, I immediately knew he was an introvert.

As the weeks progressed, I made some interesting observations about the twins. Just as his mother and sister had told me, the introverted teen was very hesitant to speak with me. For our first session, he asked if he could read from a book instead of conversing.

His sister, on the other hand, eagerly suggested that we visit local attractions during our meetings. With little prompting, she immediately launched into a series of stories from the past three years of her life. The topics ranged from boyfriends, to friends, to personal struggles. I must confess that I was delighted that she didn't subject me to too much small talk.

By the second session, the boy felt comfortable enough to put aside the book and simply converse. He always began our conversations by asking me questions. He would only talk about himself after I invited him to do so. Although he spoke more slowly than his sister, his comprehension level and vocabulary were higher. He never expressed any desire to conduct our meetings anywhere but at the kitchen table.

One night, during dinner with the family, the topic of careers and money came up. The introverted twin immediately chimed in and said that he didn't care about making money; he cared only about making art. The sister responded by saying she wanted to make a lot of money. She noted that money would allow her to do the many things she wanted to do.

So, what has my highly scientific and comprehensive twins study taught me about introversion? Well, firstly, it reinforced my belief that introversion is a 'nature' personality trait. It also highlighted

how differently introverts and extroverts view and interact with the world. These distinctions in behavior and perspective are no coincidence.

According to research, our desires and actions are greatly influenced by dopamine levels in the brain. Dopamine is a chemical that influences responses to rewards and novelty. Introverts need less dopamine to feel good. Too much outside stimulation can cause an introvert's brain to be flooded with an excess of dopamine.

This might explain why an introvert would rather practice a new language at home than go out. Dopamine sensitivity also makes introverts more likely to seek meaning than the buzz associated with happiness. External rewards, such as money and status, are less appealing to introverts. We're more motivated by internal rewards like the satisfaction that comes from creating art.

Conversely, extroverts are less sensitive to dopamine. They need more of the 'feel-good chemical' to be content. This causes them to crave more external stimuli and rewards than introverts. They are typically more motivated by money, social interaction and novelty than internal factors. They are the people who would rather go on an excursion than conduct a meeting at home.

Research has also shown that introverts process more information than extroverts in any given situation. This does not mean that we are more intelligent than extroverts. It does, however, explain why we need more quiet to think. Too many people, noises, and bright lights overwhelm our busy brains. Other interesting physiological manifestations of introversion include:

-
- Lower blood pressure
 - Greater sensitivity to caffeine
 - Tendency to salivate more easily
 - Sweating more in reaction to pain, smell and taste

All of the above information tells us that there is a biological basis for introvert behavior. When an introvert ‘zones out’, he is actually protecting himself from overstimulation. Being alone is a way of regulating dopamine levels.

Most importantly, we see that introversion is a core personality trait, which is present from infancy. It can’t be fixed, changed or outgrown. And that’s a good thing.

Chapter 2: Removing The Mask of Extroversion

1. WHY WE PRETEND TO BE EXTROVERTED

“Don’t bend, don’t water it down, don’t try to make it logical; don’t edit your soul according to the fashion. Rather, follow your most intense obsessions mercilessly.” ~Franz Kafka

Introverts are often told that we must change. Others chastise us for being too serious and quiet. They tell us that our innate desires are not appropriate. The world shouts, “Speak up! Loosen up! Lighten up! Be someone you’re not, or be left behind.” And so, that is precisely what we do; we wear the mask of extroversion in hopes that we won’t be cast aside and forgotten.

Pretending to be extroverted becomes a way of life for a lot of introverts. From an early age we recognize the power of having this incredibly appealing personality type. We learn that to be popular, successful and attractive, we must act extroverted.

In childhood we notice that smiley, talkative children are favored. As teens, our hormones beg us to try on a more attention-grabbing personality. If we don’t succumb to pseudo-extroversion in our youth, we are certain to do so in adulthood.

We act extroverted in an effort to land that job, which calls for enthusiastic, outgoing multitaskers. We searched, but couldn’t find any ads for quiet, singletaskers who prefer to work alone. Bummer.

Likewise, we wear the mask of extroversion in social situations. We learn to speak louder, laugh more and take up more space. We

might even enjoy getting our extrovert on every so often. After all, it does get us what we want ...right?

Unfortunately, the things we want often transform and turn on us. The luscious apple we've been coveting becomes poisonous. The people we strive to emulate turn out to be just as flawed and human as ourselves.

We become like those dieters who replace the foods they love with fake, low calorie substitutes. They discover that the low-fat substitute is packed with sugar; the sugar free version might cause cancer; the tofu equivalent tastes like rubber, and all of it leaves them feeling unsatisfied. They are left to wonder, what now?

I can't help but be reminded of countless cheesy makeover movies (ie. Clueless, She's All That and The Princess Diaries). The story is always the same. An unattractive and awkward young woman (or not-so-classy prostitute in the case of Pretty Woman) is transformed. All of a sudden she is beautiful, popular and more confident. Oh yeah, and she finds true love.

Everything is wonderful until she realizes that (OMG!) money and beauty don't solve all your problems. It turns out that her fake self attracted fake friends who never really cared about her. Somehow, true love still prevails, but let's not focus on that.

Movies like these are very indicative of the mindset of our society. They perpetuate the idea that happiness lies on the other side of the makeover. They tell us fulfillment can be achieved once we reach a certain dress size or income level. They imply that true joy is thrust upon us by external forces. And maybe they're partially right.

Superficial changes feel good for a little while; however, the effects are only temporary.

Giving ourselves an extrovert makeover can have similar outcomes. It might get us what we want, but not what we need. The grass is not always greener on the other side.

I used to devote a lot of energy to trying to be more extroverted. I was afraid that my quiet, intensely creative, overly sensitive self would not – could not – be accepted by the world.

Early on, I felt that society had rejected me because of my introversion. Like many people, I don't handle rejection well. It gnaws away at me and fills my mind with self-doubt. It drives me to tweak and twist myself into someone who can't be denied (which is impossible, of course, but that doesn't stop me from trying).

I sought to win back the world's affection by stomping down my introversion. I replaced solitude with constant activity and my innate ability to focus with a sort of forced ADD. I projected a more glittery, dazzling and extroverted self-image (literally - I used to be a competitive Latin dancer/performer).

I won't deny that behaving more extroverted did have its benefits. It allowed me to get jobs, make new friends, and network. But just like in the makeover movies, much of what I gained was superficial or temporary.

Those jobs that call for outgoing, enthusiastic people kinda suck if you're not actually outgoing and enthusiastic. They also have the side effect of leaving introverts feeling drained and inadequate.

In the social realm, pseudo-extroversion is pretty much expected. When I have the energy, I enjoy playing extrovert. For very short periods, I can even be bubbly. The problem is that people who meet me when I'm acting extroverted are very confused by my introverted behavior later on.

2. THE CONSEQUENCES OF ACTING OUT OF CHARACTER

We can hide our real personality for only so long. Within time, our true nature begins to tug at our sleeves, urging us to seek out solitude. This can manifest as zoning out, irritability, or sudden quietness. Without any energy left to maintain the charade, we retreat to our corners and seek out quiet.

It is important to remember that all the energy we invest into being more extroverted equals less energy for other things. The mind is not a limitless resource. For introverts, the overstimulation that comes with being a pseudo-extrovert can tire our brains. Research has shown that introverts who act extroverted perform more poorly on subsequent cognitive tests.

For me, constantly behaving like an extrovert caused a creative drought in my life. All the energy I put into acting out of character left me feeling frazzled and drained. My innate ability to focus diminished and my creative capabilities dried up.

It is difficult for introverts to switch quickly between tasks (hence the inability to multitask). Likewise, we can't just flick between a more introverted and extroverted personality without any consequences. We lose time, energy and focus every time we act out of character. More importantly, we risk losing ourselves.

Every time we stomp down our introverted nature, we crush part of our soul in the process. In order to make way for our louder, more extroverted alter ego, we must bury a part of ourselves.

Consequently, it will become more and more difficult to unearth the treasures of our true personality. Eventually, we come to a crossroads where we can choose to peel back the mask, or risk losing ourselves forever. If we choose the former, we have our work cut out for us.

3. PUTTING AN END TO ENVY

As introverts, we receive a lot of negative feedback simply for being ourselves. We are perceived as strange because we are quiet. We are criticized for not being extroverted enough. In short, we are made to feel that our true self is not acceptable. As a result, we begin to compare ourselves with people who possess more popular personality types.

For introverts, it is all too easy to compare ourselves to extroverts and feel pretty lousy for it. Perhaps, we secretly wish that we could think on our feet like a fast-talking coworker. We might buy into the idea that chatty, bubbly women are more desirable. We can become envious of the smooth-talking charmer that women flock to.

We assume that these people are somehow superior. We forget that those who possess the qualities we lack aren't any better than we are. They weren't given a bigger piece of the awesome pie. They are just as flawed, but in different ways.

There is a long list of extrovert qualities that I used to covet. I

wished I didn't suck so much at multitasking. I wanted to be more forward and flirtatious. I dreamed that someday I would be the one who always knew what to say and when to say it. Then I had a light bulb moment.

I realized that the girl at work who is great at multitasking also has trouble focusing. The person who always knows what to say might not know when to shut-up. And don't even get me started on the smooth talker with swag. He's a jerk. End of story.

We shouldn't feel bad if others shine in areas where we sink. Everyone falls short of perfect in their own way. Instead of striving to be like someone else, we should discover who we really are.

4. REDISCOVERING OUR AUTHENTIC SELF

Being authentic is easier said than done. The phrase "be yourself" has been repeatedly seared into all of our minds. It is that vague and annoying saying that people dredge up in nearly every conversation about personality. But in order to be ourselves, we must first figure out who we really are.

Knowing ourselves involves unlocking our deepest desires and passions. It requires that we make the distinction between what we believe and what others tell us we should believe. To do this, we must tune out the noise of popular opinion and rediscover our inner voice. As Steve Jobs once said:

"Don't be trapped by dogma - which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of other's opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to

follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.”

As we begin to replace the noise of other people’s opinions with our own authentic voice, we will experience a myriad of positive side effects. We will learn to navigate the world with greater confidence. Without the distraction of other people pulling us in different directions, the right path will clearly present itself.

When we are projecting our most authentic self out into the world, we also attract more authentic relationships. We find our tribe. Our tribe or community consists of people who share our core beliefs and worldview. In other words, they ‘get us’. When we hide our true nature, it is very difficult for our tribe to find us.

Most importantly, embracing our true nature allows us to live with purpose. Many introverts don’t realize that our flaws are closely linked to our greatest strengths. The parts of us that society rejects go hand in hand with all the good things we have to offer the world. By accepting ourselves – our whole selves – we allow our potential to soar.

Remember, your true self is the accumulation of all the quirks, secret talents, and beautiful flaws that you were made to embody. We’re not in grade school anymore. What made you weird as a child is now your greatest asset. Every awkward caterpillar is destined to become a butterfly. Likewise, we are all meant to unfold into a more beautifully authentic version of ourselves.

Chapter 3: Embracing Our Quiet Strengths

1. GIFTS ARE MEANT TO BE SHARED

Every introvert has unique gifts and talents to offer the world. Rather than flaunting our strengths, we often keep them hidden. This sometimes leads others to underestimate us. They wrongly presume that our quietness indicates a lack of ability. In reality, the opposite is true.

Beneath our modest exterior lies a treasure trove of strengths. But because we don't like to live in the spotlight, we often let others take center stage. We are aware that people might think less of us because we don't 'sell' ourselves enough. Yet, we still prefer to keep a large portion of our greatness hidden.

There are a lot of reasons why we choose to keep our quiet powers under wraps. Naturally, we don't want to come off as arrogant or boastful. Many of us feel more comfortable being the Great Oz behind the curtain than strutting our stuff on the yellow brick road.

Of course, there might also be an element of fear. Developing our gifts involves risk. We take a gamble on ourselves and hope that we don't fail miserably. We open ourselves up to judgment and ridicule from others. We take a chance and pray that no one will write nasty comments on our blog posts.

Strangely enough, we also fear our own power. Part of us is afraid to reach our full potential, and shine. As writer Marianne Williamson puts it:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our

darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?" ~Marianne Williamson

We shouldn't let fear stop us from sharing our gifts. Being modest about our talents is one thing, but withholding them from the world is something else entirely. In Bible terms, it is the equivalent of hiding our light under a bushel. The good book also likens it to storing our money in the piggy bank instead of investing it so that it can grow (to paraphrase quite heavily).

As introverts, we might think that we are doing a noble thing by shrinking so that others can shine. We hide our light. We squander our talents. We forget that cowardice is not the same as humility. As a result, we rob the world of something it desperately needs.

Whether our talents develop behind the scenes or in the spotlight, they are only fully realized when they collide with what the world needs. Our unique gifts give us the power to inspire, create connections and make a difference. When we keep them to ourselves, we deny others the potential benefits. Again, Williamson describes this truth brilliantly:

"Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do ... And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others." ~Marianne Williamson

2. SURPRISING INTROVERT STRENGTHS

The talents we have to offer the world are as unique to each of us as a fingerprint. Some of us have been endowed with an unstoppable

creative streak. Others are born leaders. A lot of introverts thrive in activities that require focused, solitary work. But there are also many of us who shine in the seemingly extroverted realms of public speaking and performing.

Indeed, introverts bring a wide variety of strengths to the world. While most people are quick to recognize our gifts of focus and deep thought, few acknowledge our less obvious powers of daydreaming, leadership and communication.

DAYDREAMING

In the preface I touched upon the merits of daydreaming. Let's further explore why this surprising virtue can be an introvert's greatest strength.

Introverts are known for our tendency to mind wander. We love to fantasize, daydream and frolic through the rich landscapes of our imagination. While many people are eager to point out the negative aspects of this habit, few recognize its undeniable benefits.

Neuroscientists have found that daydreaming facilitates self-reflection, creativity, problem solving and learning. Three styles of daydreaming have been identified: poor attentional control, guilty-dysphoric daydreaming and positive constructive daydreaming. Indulging in the last-mentioned style results in the most tangible benefits.

In a recent paper, entitled "Ode to Positive Constructive Daydreaming", published in the journal *Frontiers in Psychology*, writer Rebecca McMillan and NYU psychologist, Scott Kaufman,

explore the positive aspects of positive constructive daydreaming.² They note that mind wandering can be a voluntary act, which yields immediate rewards. The authors explain:

“Individuals can choose to disengage from external tasks, decoupling attention, in order to pursue an internal stream of thought that they expect to pay off in some way. The pay off may be immediate, coming in the form of pleasing reverie, insight, or new synthesis of material, or it may be more distant as in rehearsing upcoming scenarios or projecting oneself forward in time to a desired outcome.”

Daydreaming can also help us to make connections between past experiences and present circumstances. As we do this, we begin to gain new insights. We are able to delve beyond superficial understanding and uncover the deeper meaning beneath each experience.

Instead of feeling ashamed of our ability to mind wander, introverts should embrace the positive aspects of this habit. Like so many other hidden introvert strengths, daydreaming is a quiet virtue that wields enormous power.

LEADERSHIP

A lot of people wrongly assume that extroverts make the best leaders. In reality, introverts can thrive in leadership roles. One need only consider the countless examples of outstanding introverted leaders to confirm this; Warren Buffet, Bill Gates and

²Rebecca L. McMillan, Scott B. Kaufman and Jerome L. "Singer. Ode to positive constructive daydreaming." *Frontiers in Psychology* (23 Sept 2013): Article 626.

Andrea Jung (Avon chief executive) are just a few examples of introverts who steered their companies toward success.

How can someone who is quiet have such great influence? And what is it about introverted leaders that sets them apart from their competition? To answer this, let's take a closer look at what great leadership entails. Writer, John Buchan, once said:

“The task of leadership is not to put greatness into people, but to elicit it, for the greatness is there already.” ~John Buchan

First and foremost, outstanding leaders are able to inspire their team. They instill in them a desire to be better. Through example and gentle guidance, they elicit greatness from their people.

People tend to think that great leaders have booming voices and larger than life personalities. We falsely believe that to be powerful one must have a forceful personality. But, this is not the case. The very wise Lao-Tsu, explained:

“To lead people, walk beside them ... As for the best leaders, the people do not notice their existence. The next best, the people honor and praise. The next, the people fear; and the next, the people hate ... When the best leader's work is done the people say, ‘We did it ourselves!’” ~Lao-Tsu

Inspiring people to do great work does not necessarily involve backslapping and endless enthusiasm. Neither does it require charisma and talkativeness. In reality, the most effective leaders have more subtle strengths.

When it comes to leadership, a calm demeanor is more effective than emotional outbursts; listening is more important than talking;

humility is more admirable than arrogance; and character is more valuable than charisma. Author, Scott Berkun, summarizes this sentiment well:

“I think there are non-obvious ways to lead ... Leadership does not need to be a dramatic, fist in the air and trumpets blaring, activity.”
~ Scott Berkun

Introverts have the innate gifts required for highly effective leadership. Our gentle power can inspire without intimidating. Our ability to listen more than we speak encourages the flow of great ideas. We also know how to use silence to spark creativity in both our followers and ourselves.

The introverted tendency to stay with problems longer and look at them from every angle prevents potential catastrophe. Our aversion to risk serves as a further shield against future problems.

Introverted leaders are also known for focusing on preparation. This is especially evident in speeches and presentations, but can be seen in every area of our work. Careful preparation allows us to confidently lead our team in the right direction.

As quiet and thoughtful leaders, we guide our people towards success. Using gentle influence, we inspire them to see greatness in themselves, rather than in us.

COMMUNICATION

“Talk low, talk slow, and don’t talk too much.” – John Wayne

Introverts aren’t known for having outstanding communication skills. But it turns out that introverts have several strengths when it comes to conversation.

I have been reading a lot of articles about effective communication lately. Advice on the topic varies, but there are a few constants. All of the articles stressed the importance of listening, speaking slowly and making eye contact. Being a great storyteller was not mentioned. Neither was charisma or wittiness. These qualities are attractive, but not necessary for good communication.

“An appreciative listener is always stimulating.” ~Agatha Christie

In conversation, introverts tend to listen more than we speak. We prefer to wait until there is a clear break in conversation before interjecting. We expect the person we’re speaking with to return the favor. Laurie Helgoe, author of *Introvert Power: Why Your Inner Life Is Your Hidden Strength*, compares this conversation style to jazz:

“Introvert conversations are like jazz. Each player gets to solo for a nice stretch before the other player comes in and does his solo.”

Introverts aren’t likely to constantly interrupt during conversation. This is important because interrupting is a communication no-no. Robert E. Fisher, author of *Quick to Listen Slow to Speak*, points out that “interruption is basically a self-serving and egotistical act. It blatantly states that what I have to say is more important than what you have to say.”

By the simple act of listening, introverts can be far better communicators than overly chatty extroverts.

Introverts often feel self-conscious about how long it takes for us to verbalize our thoughts. At times it seems impossible to keep up with fast-moving conversations. The extrovert tendency to flit quickly between topics doesn’t help.

According to communication experts, we shouldn't feel bad about our slow-talking ways – quite the opposite! Speaking slowly is a key component of effective communication. It allows others to understand, process and appreciate what we are saying. It can also make us appear more confident because speaking quickly is a sign of nervousness.

Taking time to compose our thoughts before speaking has the added advantage of making us appear more intelligent. Small pauses show that we are thinking. They also increase anticipation and tension, drawing the listener in.

Introverts tend to make a lot of eye contact while listening. This shows that we are paying attention. It also increases trust. Shifty eyes give the impression that you are lying or distracted.

Many introverts are prone to breaking eye contact when we speak. We do this in order to formulate our thoughts. To have a greater impact, try to make eye contact every few seconds as you talk.

As you can see, introverts naturally make great communicators. Here are a few more things we can do to build on our existing skills:

- Use open body language – avoid crossed arms and slouching.
- Avoid judging – people can sense when they are being judged and this will cause them to close off.
- Identify and express emotions – your words and body language should reflect how you truly feel. This will increase trust and connection.
- Speak clearly – avoid mumbling.

There are countless other areas where the quiet strengths of

introverts can shine. Here are a few to consider:

WRITING

Many writers identify themselves introverts. This is not surprising considering that writing is best done in solitude. Introverts often thrive in this highly focused and creative field. Writing gives us the chance to explore ideas and put our busy imagination to use.

PUBLIC SPEAKING

This might not seem like an introvert activity, but hear me out. When we give a speech or presentation, we plan and rehearse what we will say. We have plenty of time to think about the topic. This is an ideal scenario for introverts.

The other plus is that a speech is not a conversation. Most of the time we are not directly interacting with our audience. No one is going to change the subject or interrupt us. For many introverts, this is refreshing to say the least.

VISUAL ART

Introverts can shine in a variety of artistic endeavors. Creating visual art allows us to use our gifts of focus, patience and imagination. Art is also a powerful form of self-expression, which gives quiet introverts a voice.

PERFORMING

Again, this seems like an activity reserved for extroverts, but it is not. Some of the greatest actors, dancers and musicians are introverts. Here are some of the reasons introverts make great performers:

- Like public speaking, a performance is usually premeditated

and rehearsed.

- The audience is there to give us energy, rather than take it away.
- Most performances are short so they will not deplete our precious energy reserves.
- The aspect of role-play allows us to do things we would never do in real life.

As introverts, we might prefer to wait for an explicit invitation to share our talents. We're not usually the ones who call out the answer in class or lead the conga line at a party. A gentle nudge in the right direction can help us take the first step.

So, I'm going to give you a little push. With the powers vested in me as an introvert blogger, I give you permission to share your talents with the world.

If you'd prefer to do so behind a curtain, that's okay. If you'd rather show than tell, even better. What matters most is that you find a way give the world that which only you can give.

Chapter 4: Reshaping Our Environment To Fit Us

1. OVERCOMING THE CULTURE OF CHARISMA

The 20th century marked a shift in how people formed their identity in the world. Suddenly, having a likeable personality was more important than qualities like integrity, good morals and citizenship. Put simply, character was overshadowed by charisma.

Today, our culture remains preoccupied with charisma. Being magnetic and charming often trumps having true character. This is most evident in Hollywood and politics, but can be seen everywhere.

It is common for people with questionable morals and no integrity to win favor with the masses. Simply being likeable can get a person very far in this world. For introverts, especially, this is a troubling phenomenon. We are often discounted because we don't have the forceful presence of a more charismatic person. Our quieter virtues are outshined by the dazzling charm of someone with a big personality.

This is not to say that charisma is without value. Charismatic leaders, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., have done great things for humanity. Celebrities with larger than life personalities entertain us and make us laugh. The queen of charisma herself, Oprah Winfrey, inspires millions of people to live their best life.

What is troublesome is when people give charisma a higher value than qualities like integrity and honesty. In these cases, charisma is just a shiny shield for those with no character to hide behind.

We all know people who promise the world, but never deliver. We've

worked with a guy who didn't pull his weight. We've been shocked by someone's lack of integrity. Surprisingly, these people are often rewarded despite their lack of character. The smooth-talker gets laid. The gregarious slacker gets a promotion. The backstabbing beauty queen wins the crown. The moral of the story: others will overlook a host of negative qualities if someone is charming and likeable.

In high school, I was one of those annoying, goody-goody, high achiever types. I was involved in many extracurricular activities, including students' council. Much to my delight, in my final year I was nominated to be valedictorian. This might not seem like a responsibility an introvert would covet, but it was my secret dream. I loved giving speeches and I was quite good at it.

Unfortunately, I lost to someone else. The girl who ended up being valedictorian was smart, well-rounded and very deserving of the honor. She was also a lot more popular than me. At the time, I couldn't help but feel that the odds were slanted in her favor because of her bubbly, outgoing nature. I thought I could have won if only I were as charismatic as she was.

Many introverts might wish we were sprinkled with a tad bit more charisma dust. We see the perks of having this attractive quality and can't help but covet it. But in doing so, we downplay our greatest assets.

We forget that true character goes to the core of who we are – well beyond the superficial space that charisma inhabits. Our character is one of the few things in this world that can't be taken away from us. Charisma can get you a free drink and some phony friends, but

developing character will get you what money can't buy: self-respect, fulfillment and purpose.

2. THE RIGHT LIGHTING MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

As introverts, we might forget that we are the architects of our lives. Even if it is an extrovert's world, we have the power to carve out our own ideal environment. Gregariousness may win favor with the masses, but it doesn't have to rule our kingdom.

Instead of always trying to fit in, introverts should find people and places that fit us. We should spend less time in fish out of water situations and more time in environments that bring us joy; less time with strangers and more time with loved ones; less time trying to fit the mold and more time finding spaces where we can spread our wings.

The other night I was watching the special features from the movie *Benny & Joon*. They included clips of the cinematographer doing lighting and color tests with each actor. He demonstrated how different lighting and wardrobe colors could drastically affect each actor's appearance. The moral of the story: no one can shine under every type of lighting. Even movie stars can look drab and unattractive under certain circumstances.

Likewise, introverts cannot shine in every situation. There are places where we don't fit in. There are occasions when we'd rather shrink than share the spotlight. Often, we hang out in the shadows and play the role of silent observer. Sometimes keeping our distance is a personal preference. Sometimes it's not.

Another way of looking at it is to use Susan Cain's comparison of an introvert to an orchid; we can grow strong and beautiful under the

right conditions, but wilt and fade otherwise. We're not like dandelions that annoyingly sprout up anywhere and draw lots of attention while doing so.

As a result of my diverse life experiences, I've found myself in a lot of uncomfortable scenarios. Like many introverts, I struggle with certain group dynamics. These include:

- Breaking into an already formed group where everyone knows each other.
- Speaking to more than two or three people at once (unless I'm giving a rehearsed speech, which I enjoy).
- House parties where the primary activities are drinking (A LOT), watching music videos and/or trying to make conversation with people I have nothing in common with.
- Nearly every activity involving electronic music.

Rather than feel saddened by my inability to twist and contort my personality to match every environment, I'm learning to give myself a break. I'm finding my stride in the nooks and crannies of my environment. I'm realizing that it's okay to feel out of place sometimes. It just means that I'm not in my element. I'm sure the party animals with whom I feel so maladroit would flounder on my turf.

Unfortunately, introverts get used to being in social environments where we feel out of place. We become comfortable with being uncomfortable. In his article, *My Life Report*, New York Times columnist Stanley Fish expresses the feeling well:

“What I didn't do so well, and haven't yet done, was figure out how to be at ease in the world. I noticed something about myself when I

was married to my first wife, an excellent cook and hostess who knew how to throw a party. My main job was to dole out the drinks, which I liked to do because I could stand behind the bar and never have to really talk to anyone. (“Do you want ice with that?”) My happiest moment, and the moment I was looking forward to all evening, was when the party was over and failure of any number of kinds had been avoided once again. “

Like Stanley, we all have social obligations to fulfill. We have to go places we don’t want to go and do things we don want to do. But what about the rest of the time? Should we be spending our free time in social situations that make us feel bad about ourselves? Laurie Helgoe perfectly sums up the answer to that question:

“A good rule of thumb is that any environment that consistently leaves you feeling bad about who you are is the wrong environment.”

There is nothing wrong with enjoying different activities than our extroverted counterparts. We don’t need to feel bad about our personal preferences. As famous introvert, Emma Watson once said:

“Don’t feel stupid if you don’t like what everyone else pretends to love.”

Perhaps the places you frequent don’t provide the ideal lighting for your personality. Maybe those ‘friends’ that you dread hanging out with aren’t really your friends. That uncomfortable feeling you experience might be your inner voice telling you there is somewhere else you should be.

The rest of the world will keep trying to teach you to “loosen up” and

“join the party”. That’s okay. If you don’t fit in, fit out; relish being on the outskirts where you can observe and wander. Carve out your own space in this world.

Chapter 5: It's Okay to Want to Be Alone

1. WHAT MAKES AN INTROVERT FEEL ALIVE?

"It's beautiful to be alone. To be alone does not mean to be lonely. It means the mind is not influenced and contaminated by society."
~Jiddu Krishnamurti

Alone time is essential to the wellbeing of introverts. We need solitude to reflect and recharge. If we don't have enough time to ourselves, we can quickly become harried, growling bundles of discontentment waiting to implode.

The rest of the world won't accept our need to escape from the crowd. They invite, encourage and even bully us to join in on their antics. Sometimes we oblige, but other times, we simply can't be bothered. Instead, we close the door and joyously dive into solitude.

Many people are perplexed, annoyed or offended by our need to be alone. They assume that we are avoiding them because we don't like them, which is usually not the case.

Another common misconception is that we isolate ourselves because we are depressed. People forget that aloneness is not the same as loneliness. Many introverts feel lonelier in a crowded room full of strangers than when we are by ourselves.

Instead of feeling sad when we are alone, we feel energized. Unlike extroverts, who feel happiest when they are surrounded by people, introverts find joy in solitude. This is because we do not associate happiness with our environments in the same way that extroverts do.

A great example of this is the widespread popularity of extreme bucket lists. Bucket lists are comprised of things a person wishes to do before they die. These lists often include skydiving, car racing, and other adrenaline junkie activities. Many people also have travel destinations on their lists.

A quick scroll through the tweets of @ThatBucketList, who has over 487, 277 followers, yields phrases like:

“Before I die I want to go to Vegas with my friends.”

“Before I die I want to buy all the clothes I want.”

“Before I die I want to go bungee jumping.”

The activities on a bucket list are meant to make you feel alive (why everyone wants to have the sensation that they are about to die before they die is a mystery to me). Apparently, a lot of people associate feeling alive with jumping out of planes and indulging in luxuries. That’s cool. To each his own.

But I can’t help but wonder, what would an introvert’s ideal bucket list look like? For introverts, who feel most alive in solitude, a bucket list can take on a very different form.

Introverts recognize that many of life’s greatest moments happen when we are alone. Aliveness seizes us as we are turning over a great idea in our mind. It reverberates through us as we silently soak in a majestic sunrise. On a twilight jog, it is inhaled with each quickened breath.

We know that aliveness springs forth from the core of our being and dissipates in solitude, in silence. We do not require a list of adrenaline inducing activities to feel alive. We need only ourselves.

Introverts derive great contentment from what's happening in our mind. In a noisy world with flashing lights in every direction, our mind is a familiar place to retreat and feel at home. Thus, we flourish in places that allow us to hear our own thoughts.

Within our own mind we can make connections and discoveries that light us up inside. While working on a problem or project we enter into a state of 'flow'. Flow is a sort of energized focus. It involves single-mindedness and complete absorption in an activity.

Flow ignites a different sort of happiness – the slow-burning kind that is fueled by the mind. It is not dependent on money or status or our environment. Flow is achieved in the quiet, the rhythmic, and the busy solitude of an active mind.

Indeed, solitude is a wellspring of life for introverts. It is where we can dive deep into the things that bring us joy. It is a quiet joy that is insulted by the loud cheers and thrashing often associated with the word. It is less about 'fun' and more about depth and understanding.

2. WHY SOLITUDE IS ESSENTIAL FOR CREATIVITY

"Closed in a room, my imagination becomes the universe, and the rest of the world is missing out." ~Criss Jami

Our love of solitude also helps us to unlock our creativity. While others embrace groupthink and team brainstorming, introverts recognize the power of independent thinking.

Group work fosters conformity. True creativity occurs away from the crowd. Without the distraction of other (often louder) people, the mind will offer up its best ideas. Free from the judging eyes of the

group, it can wonder and make connections.

As humans, our natural inclination is to procrastinate or avoid creative work. It's difficult to focus our mind and energy on something as illusive as an idea under construction. Instead, we find ways to distract ourselves. If we are smart, we trick ourselves into thinking we are being productive as we procrastinate.

Just like surfing the net or snacking on a full stomach, group brainstorming is more of a distraction than a productive activity. It offers the illusion of creative connectivity, but really only produces social connectivity. As Apple co-creator, Steve Wozniak put it:

"I don't believe anything really revolutionary has ever been invented by committee... I'm going to give you some advice that might be hard to take. That advice is: Work alone... Not on a committee. Not on a team."

Instead of tearing down walls and cramming people into meeting after meeting, individuals should be given space to create. Before even considering groupthink, people should learn to think on their own. Most of all, it's time for society to acknowledge what introverts have known all along; great ideas – like great people – develop away from the crowd.

Unfortunately, some extroverts refuse to let us seek out the solitude we crave. These people make us feel like aliens for wanting to be alone for a while. They tell us we are being party-poopers. They label us as boring. Sometimes, they even accuse us of being anti-social and rude.

I have been chastised more than once for my solitary nature, but one incident in particular stands out in my mind. In my early

twenties, my partner and I shared a house with another young couple. Most nights we all ate dinner together. After everyone was finished eating, I usually retired to my room for the rest of the evening.

One day, the other hen of the house told me she and her partner were very offended that I didn't sit and converse with them after dinner each night. She found my behavior rude and unacceptable.

Her reaction astounded me. I couldn't believe that my desire to be alone in my own home so deeply offended her. Instead of balking at her overreaction, I felt an enormous sense of guilt.

Introverts should not feel guilty for fulfilling our need to be alone. Both introverts and extroverts must compromise to keep each other happy. This is inescapable. The thing is, introverts can spend so much time bending and adjusting to please extroverts that we completely deny our own desires.

It is perfectly reasonable to ask extroverts to meet us halfway. They can do this by recognizing our need to be alone and allowing us to fulfill it without guilt. Everyone will be better off if introverts are given space to indulge in the rejuvenating power of solitude.

3. HOW MUCH ALONE TIME IS TOO MUCH?

Indeed, introverts can gain many benefits from heeding our desire to be alone, but like all good things, too much alone time can have negative side effects. Introverts are not immune to the torment of loneliness. Too little social interaction and we risk crossing over into the darker realms of depression and hermit-dom (not a real word, but you get the idea).

Some of you may have heard of the phenomenon in Japan known as “Hikikomori”. Hikikomori is defined as a state of self-imposed social isolation lasting six months or longer. Hundreds of thousands of Japanese youth have chosen to withdraw to their bedrooms for months or even years. These modern-day hermits shun all forms of social interaction in favor of unhappy seclusion.

While we’re on the topic of extreme hermit cases, I read an article a few months ago about the Maine ‘North Pond Hermit’. This man spent nearly three decades in complete isolation in the Maine woods. His arrest for burglarizing a nearby youth camp for disabled children was believed to be his first contact with other people in 27 years.

Most introverts are a far cry from the Hikikomori youths and deranged hermits of this world. We know the importance of human connections. We value our close friends and family; however, we are susceptible to unwanted feelings of isolation. At times, our aloneness seeps into areas where it doesn’t belong. Peaceful silence becomes a messenger of sadness; contented solitude transforms into loneliness.

Sure, there are some hermits that are pretty cool. I would love to be the wise sage living in an enchanted forest for a day or two. I also have great respect for the spiritual leaders who withdrew from the world so that they could be enlightened (props to Buddha). For the rest of us, the hermit life is unappealing and unnecessary.

When I go more than three or four days in a row without human interaction, I become restless. I begin to obsess over things that aren’t worth obsessing over. I start to feel agitated and morose.

Soon, the dreaded “L” word begins to taunt me wherever I go. In my bedroom, in the kitchen, outside – even while watching a beautiful sunset – loneliness is there.

Loneliness can be especially tormenting for introverts who don’t have close friends or family nearby. Acquaintances just don’t do it for us. We need our trusted loved ones by our sides or we can feel lonely even when surrounded by people.

I have struggled with this during my travels. Because I usually [couchsurf](#) or stay with friends, I am rarely completely by myself. But when you’re in a new country, surrounded by ‘friends’ who were strangers a day earlier, you can feel more alone than ever.

Perhaps you can spend seven days in blissful isolation without feeling sad or lonely. Or maybe you can handle only one day of seclusion before you start itching for social interaction. The important thing is to know when it is time to reach out to those you care about and welcome them back into your world.

Chapter 6: Why Less is More for Introverts

1. SAYING NO TO THE CULTURE OF MORE

“Don’t underestimate the value of doing nothing, of just going along, listening to all the things you can’t hear, and not bothering.”
~Winnie The Pooh

For introverts, the saying ‘too much of a good thing’ is particularly relevant. Many things that we enjoy are only enjoyable in small doses. Crowds, parties, loud music and loud people might be entertaining for a little while, but they quickly deplete our energy.

For many introverts, our greatest achievements occur in the empty spaces of life. We thrive in the culture of less. We accomplish more when we let go of the busybody mentality.

Unfortunately, we live in a culture of more; everyone is always striving for more money, more popularity, and more possessions. Our society also has an obsession with doing more. Somehow, the world has confused busyness with productivity.

Introverts, too, can get sucked into the culture of more. We can ignore our innate thirst for solitude. We can forget the value of doing less.

This attitude can be especially damaging for introverts. In order to fit in, we cram our schedules with unnecessary tasks and social commitments. We become mentally and physically exhausted as we try to keep up with busybody extroverts.

Some individuals can handle more overloading than others. They can juggle several tasks at once, and even enjoy it. As introverts,

we tend to thrive when we keep our load light, but focused.

All the magic workings of the mind require time. The more we say yes to the demands of others, the less time we have for creativity, critical thinking, and innovation. In order to guard our time, we must learn to say no.

Saying no is difficult. We fear that we will be deemed rude or selfish if we don't comply. We don't want to be mean and we most certainly don't want to cause conflict. Consequently, we jump on the conformity bandwagon and become overcommitted yes-people like everyone else.

But we shouldn't view saying no as a bad thing. Saying no can be a means of saying yes to something better. A person might say no to traveling so that they can find joy and fulfillment in raising a family. A student might decline a party invitation to do homework and achieve good grades.

A number of notable people said no to studying so that they could say yes to practicing their passions. Two years into his program, Bill Gates dropped out of Harvard to found Microsoft. We all know how the rest of that story goes. Mark Zuckerberg and Lady Gaga also said no to finishing school so that they could pursue their careers.

I'm not saying that everyone should drop out of school and chase rainbows. My point is that our life is defined by our choices. We have to decide what is deserving of our energy and attention right now, and what isn't. We must edit and cut away the parts that weigh us down, so that the rest can flourish.

There is a lot of advice out there on how to say no. Apparently, this

two-letter word stirs up so much anxiety in us that we need a script to buffer its blow. The N-word can be padded with grown-up phrases, such as: “I have other priorities” or “I’d like to, but I don’t have time” or “let me think about it and get back to you”. If we want to get really fancy, we can memorize this quote by Charles Dickens:

“‘It is only half an hour’ – ‘It is only an afternoon’ – ‘It is only an evening,’ people say to me over and over again; but they don’t know that it is impossible to command one’s self sometimes to any stipulated and set disposal of five minutes – or that the mere consciousness of an engagement will sometime worry a whole day ... Who ever is devoted to an art must be content to deliver himself wholly up to it, and to find his recompense in it. I am grieved if you suspect me of not wanting to see you, but I can’t help it; I must go in my way whether or no.”

However we choose to frame it, saying the word no will have an impact on both the recipient and ourselves. The poor soul who is getting rejected probably won’t be thrilled about it. He might even be angry.

The more we say no, the more others will deem us selfish, boring, anti-social and aloof. And the happier we’ll be.

2. HOW WE CAN ACHIEVE MORE BY DOING LESS

The reality is, doing more does not necessarily result in accomplishing more. Filling our day with unnecessary tasks is merely a form of distraction. Sometimes distraction can be a good thing. Too much of it, however, can leave introverts drained and unhappy.

There is nothing wrong with avoiding activities that don't add value to our life. It is better to give our time and energy to a few important things than countless fruitless tasks. It doesn't mean that we are boring or lazy. In fact, making a conscious effort to restore ourselves by doing less increases productivity and performance.

The most successful people schedule time for restoration. Although they are busy, productive individuals set aside time to relax in solitude. The most effective people use a variety of solitary activities to restore themselves, including: jogging, journaling, walking the dog, spending time in nature, listening to music, and reading.

Tony Shwartz, founder and CEO of the Energy Project and best-selling author, wrote in The New York Times:

“Paradoxically, the best way to get more done may be to spend more time doing less. A new and growing body of multidisciplinary research shows that strategic renewal ... boosts productivity, job performance and, of course, health.”

3. THE ENERGY FACTOR

Introverts should also be aware of how doing too much can deplete our energy reserves. We enter into a sort of activity/recovery cycle. One big party can incapacitate us for the rest of the weekend. The non-stop celebrations that accompany the holidays often require weeks of recovery.

A few weeks ago, I attended my first Mexican wedding. There were mariachis, fireworks, and enough bottles of tequila to fill a bathtub. In truth, I had a blast. The next day, however, I felt like a wrung

out cloth, every last drop of energy drained out of me.

I spent most of the week recuperating from my weekend escapades. In this case, it was worth it. But I can think of many instances when an activity wasn't worth the price I paid in physical and mental exhaustion.

It's easy to forget that everyone has different thresholds for novelty and excitement. For some people, partying all weekend is a way of life. For others, it would be no way of living at all. As introverts, the important thing for us to remember is that energy is not a limitless resource. Every portion that we spend in one area of our life leaves less for other areas.

Because extroverts gain energy from things that drain us, they have difficulty understanding our needs. They look at us with crinkled brows when we choose to stay home on a Saturday night. They find it strange that we don't go out as much as they do. They encourage us to "seize the day" and "come out of our shells".

What they don't realize is that we have different ideas of what it means to "seize the day". What gives them a buzz gives us a headache. What makes them leap for joy makes us run for cover. What energizes them drains us.

This doesn't mean that we can't enjoy the same activities that extroverts do. But we will likely do so with our shells and excuses to leave early in tow. And we reserve the right to stay home in our pajamas the next day (or three).

4. WHY MORE POSSESSIONS SUBTRACT OUR JOY

"Find out for yourself what are the possessions and ideals that you

do not desire. By knowing what you do not want, by elimination, you will unburden the mind, and only then will it understand the essential which ever there was." ~Jiddu Krishnamurti

On top of doing more, many people are also obsessed with owning more possessions. Because introverts tend to be inward focused, we are less motivated by external rewards. Even still, we are not immune to the temptations of materialism.

As introverts navigate the culture of more, we must be careful not to let popular opinion sway our core beliefs. The world tells us that possessions are the key to fulfillment; it tries to convince us that a nice car and a big house full of stuff will bring us happiness.

But this is far from true. Often, more stuff simply leads to more worries. Introverts are better off heeding our innate desires and living with less. We should be inspired by the example of *Tiny Wings* creator, Andreas Illiger.

In an interview with Pitchfork, Illiger was asked how his life has changed since the wild success of *Tiny Wings*, the iPhone app, for which he is the sole designer. Here was his response:

“I still live in my cheap two-room apartment together with my girlfriend. I still do not have a car (I don’t even have a driver’s license), and most of my days are the same as before *Tiny Wings*: sitting in my room doing creative stuff.”

Many people would be astonished and perplexed by the successful entrepreneur’s choice to maintain a humble lifestyle. But Illiger is not driven by wealth. For him, being able to do what he loves is his primary motivator. When asked what he would like to be doing in five years, he replied:

“I live my passion and never want to do something else, so I would like to do the same thing I do now.”

Like Illiger, most introverts know that true fulfillment comes from within. When we live with purpose and passion, we want less. We recognize that we already have life’s greatest gifts. Adding lots of stuff to the equation will only serve to subtract from our happiness.

5. QUALITY OVER QUANTITY IN RELATIONSHIPS

Some people deplete us and leave us feeling more lonely than if we were by ourselves. The right people, however, can greatly enrich our lives. Famous diarist Anaïs Nin described this sentiment well:

“I am lonely, yet not everybody will do. I don't know why, some people fill the gaps and others emphasize my loneliness.”

Too many shallow friendships can decrease an introvert’s happiness. We do best when we adopt a quality over quantity approach to relationships. One true friend is more valuable than 100 acquaintances.

Introverts are more selective when choosing friends, but we are also fiercely loyal to the few people we love and trust. While we might come off as aloof, self-contained and even snobby around strangers and acquaintances, we can be quite the opposite when we are in the right environment with our most trusted friends.

A former coworker of mine once described her partner as extremely quiet and reserved when out with friends, but “a little monster” at home. I knew exactly what she meant. Her otherwise stoic boyfriend was talkative, silly and uninhibited with her. Like many introverts, he only revealed his ‘other side’ to his most trusted

companion.

This particular coworker was easygoing, very accepting and a great listener – the kind of extrovert that introverts flock to. So, it was no surprise to me that she had an introverted boyfriend who trusted her enough to be completely uninhibited in her presence.

I suspect that most introverts have an inner little monster that they share only with those they completely trust. This can be a good thing. It protects us from being hurt by people who don't really care about us. It allows us to form fewer, but deeper bonds. Instead of feeling weighed down by the demands of too many people, we are uplifted by the companionship of a trusted few.

Chapter 7: Changing The World In Our Own Quiet Way

1. USING OUR UNIQUE STRENGTHS TO EFFECT CHANGE

“In a gentle way, you can shake the world.” ~Mahatma Gandhi

A lot of people have adopted the belief that changing the world begins with changing yourself. Although this advice has genuine merit, it must be given with a caveat. Changes should bring us closer to who we were meant to be, not who we think we should be. Instead of transforming us into someone else, positive changes inspire greater authenticity and self-awareness.

As we discover who we really are, we also begin to acknowledge and optimize our gifts. In this way, we have much greater influence than if we half-heartedly mimic the talents of others. To further explore this truth, let's take a look at the micro-world of tiny organisms.

When organisms swim through water, how fast and how far they go depends on their size. Larger creatures, such as whales, can cover a lot of ground in a short period of time. Tiny organisms, like sperm, on the other hand, can't move as quickly through water molecules. To these microscopic creatures, water molecules seem like giant boulders in their path.

So, how do sperm manage to propel themselves so effectively through fluid despite the obstacles they face? Do they disguise themselves as larger creatures? Do they embark on lifestyle makeovers, so that they can become super sperm? As a last resort, do they hire a more qualified sperm to do the work for them?

Definitely not.

Sperm, like other microorganisms, have special adaptations to help them move forward. Sperm wind their tails like a corkscrew, and thus, effectively propel themselves through our bodily fluids. The fact that you and I are alive is proof positive that sperm are very good at what they do – sometimes too good.

If tiny sperm can have such an enormous impact on the world, so can we. And, like sperm, we can do so by using our own innate strengths. In fact, the simple act of embracing our introversion can effect change.

Society needs the grounding influence of reflective and introspective introverts. The weight of the extrovert ideal has thrown the world off balance. It is up to us to help bring the world back to its center. As Anaïs Nin put it:

“Our culture made a virtue of living only as extroverts. We discouraged the inner journey, the quest for center. So we lost our center and have to find it again.”

Famous blogger and best-selling author, [Chris Guillebeau](#), is a shining example of how introverts can change the world in our own unique way. Before the age of thirty-five, Chris started a social movement, wrote a best-selling book and visited every country in the world. That’s right, *every* country. He is also a [self-proclaimed introvert](#).

Chris’s first book, *The Art of Non-Conformity*, tells the world that it’s okay to live outside of the box. His catch phrase is, “you don’t have to live your life the way other people expect you to”. With that simple phrase, he opens countless doors that would otherwise

remain closed. His message is unconventional – just like he is. Chris proves that introverts can be trailblazers on the journey towards world change.

I always thought that in order to change the world you had to do something grand. I figured that you had to build elephant sanctuaries, heal the sick, feed starving children, or otherwise save the less fortunate. Making groundbreaking scientific discoveries also made the list.

I was wrong. There are several ways that we can make the world a better place, which don't necessarily involve volunteering in Africa or winning the Nobel Prize. The key is to focus on our natural gifts and abilities.

When I was younger, I spent a lot of time volunteering. I wanted to be a good person. I yearned to make a difference. I had aspirations of being a nurse or working with children. I imagined myself floating along with outstretched arms, offering light and love to the vulnerable. In reality I would have felt harried, exhausted and inadequate in these professions. Although my intentions and actions were noble, they were not really me.

Can introverts be great nurses and teachers? Of course. My point is that this introvert could not. I actually think the world is better off because I didn't become a nurse. By trying to be someone I was not, I withheld my greatest gifts from the world.

As introverts, we might be tempted to dampen our passions and quiet the call of our inner voice. Popular opinion can easily lead us down the wrong path. Instead of being the extraordinary individuals we were made to be, we waste time striving to be

normal. We doom ourselves to a life of mediocrity in careers we were never meant to pursue.

2. THE WIZARDRY BEHIND WORLD CHANGE

I recently saw an interview featuring the famous illusionist and endurance performer, David Blaine. I was intrigued by his story. When Blaine was just four years old, he saw a magician performing magic in the subway. This brief encounter sparked Blaine's lifelong fascination with the mystical art form. He later pursued a career as a magician, which quickly took off.

With his own unique brand of wizardry, Blaine captivated audiences the world over. He also broke and set several world records with his spectacular endurance stunts. Blaine has been encased, submerged, entombed and dangled from the sky before thousands of onlookers and T.V. audiences. In one of his most impressive stunts, he held his breath underwater for 17 minutes 4½ seconds, breaking the previously held world record of 16 minutes 32 seconds.

Learning about Blaine's stunts made me curious. I could not deny that his accomplishments were remarkable. But I wondered if his achievements really mattered. Had this modern-day wizard contributed something of value to our society? Can we dare suggest that he changed the world?

The answer to both of the above questions is yes. David Blaine pursued his passions with unapologetic single-mindedness. He recognized and developed his unique talents. He achieved mastery of his craft, and consequently, inspired countless others to do the same.

You see, magicians are not the only producers of magic in this world.

As Tom Bissell, author of *Magic Hours: Essays on Creators and Creation*, put it:

“To create anything – whether a short story or a magazine profile or a film or a sitcom – is to believe, if only momentarily, you are capable of magic.”

People like David Blaine stir something within us. They awaken us to both the wonders of the world and the little bit of magic within ourselves. They are significant. They have an impact.

Whether we are fascinated with magic or mathematical equations, we can use our unique gifts to change the world. What matters most is that we are true to who we are. Would Blaine have been as influential if he had decided to ignore his passions and become a Wall Street lawyer? Probably not. Likewise, introverts have the greatest impact when our authentic personality, passions and talents intersect with something the world needs.

Do the world a favor and stop living the extrovert next door’s dream. We are most influential when we use our inner compass to direct our own path. There is more than one road to changing the world and most of them don’t require you to be anyone but your true self.

Epilogue: After The Revolution

At this point, you might be wondering what became of our little friend, Loyal Bird, following his quiet revolutionary act.

After taking flight in his own unique way, Loyal Bird stayed loyal to Honest Bear. He kept on reading the dictionary. He baked more cakes that reached higher and higher into the sky. And he continued to find new worlds in the depths of the ocean.

The only thing that changed was that Loyal Bird could do all the things he loved to do without criticism from the other birds. He no longer had to listen to their incessant squawking about what he should and shouldn't do. He was free to live his life as he pleased.

He also racked up enough frequent flyer miles to fly Honest Bear and himself to Hawaii once per year. Business class.

Like Loyal Bird's revolution, the introvert revolution will likely have subtle outcomes. We will still be introverted. We will continue to crave solitude. We will remain quiet observers, watching the world from the fringes.

But let's hope that the world's perspective on introversion will change. Our culture will stop promoting the extrovert ideal, and start acknowledging the value of introverts. Then maybe – just maybe – we won't have to worry about others singling us out because of our quiet nature. We will be free to say as little as we please without risk of criticism or judgment. The stigma of being alone will be lifted and we won't need to feel guilty about seeking out solitude.

Most importantly, our self-image will improve. Instead of looking in

the mirror and seeing the extroverted qualities we lack, we will see the beauty of our authentic selves.

If nothing else, we will cling to our ability to dream. In our dreams we access other realms with endless variations in color and sound. We reflect on the past or see a million different futures. Surely, in one of these other worlds, introverts are free to just be.

Yet another reason to continue to dream ...

Personal Message from Michaela Chung:

I hope that the contents of this ebook spoke to your heart in some way. If it added value to your life, please tell others about it, so that maybe it can do the same for them. I would love to hear your feedback, comments and questions. You can reach me through the contact page of my [website](#), or connect with me through [Facebook](#) and Twitter (@MichaelaChung1).