

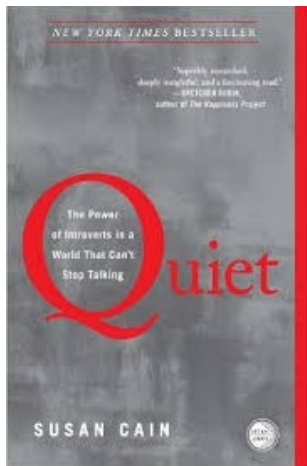
Solitude matters,
and for some
people, it's the air
they breathe.

- Susan Cain



Executive Book Summary

October 2015 - C. Aleith Cole



By Susan Cain



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Quiet

The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking

A Brief Summary

There's something to be said for being quiet and reserved. In *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, Susan Cain insists that it's time we stop pushing introverts to the side in favour of the quick-talking, dominant extrovert. In fact, she asserts the value of the solitary thinker, and suggests that Western ideals of leadership and collaboration are overlooking the many great ideas of the softer-spoken introvert.

Cain begins with traditional definitions of *introvert* and *extrovert*, and explains how the "extrovert ideal" has developed since the turn of the twentieth century. Through first-hand experiences with current-day leaders like self-help guru Tony Robbins, and evangelical Chris-

tian leader Rick Warren, she proposes that a "culture of personality" has now replaced the "culture of character" that once lauded such individuals as Abraham Lincoln and Mother Theresa.

Cain also provides thought-provoking commentary on the extrovert-centric way in which we organize our schools and businesses. She calls this tendency towards teamwork and open-concept work spaces "the New Groupthink", and cites numerous studies which support her theory that this "phenomenon has the potential to stifle productivity at work and to deprive school-children of the skills they'll need to achieve excellence in an increasingly competitive world." She also introduces readers to a number of very successful introverts such as Microsoft's Bill Gates and the

author of the *Harry Potter* series J.K. Rowling.

But Cain is neither against extroverts, nor is she calling for all positions of leadership to be held by introverts. Instead, she suggests that our organizations include work spaces and methods of collaboration that allow for creative alone time.

She ends the book with advice for the introvert or for individuals who love, teach, live with, or are raising an introvert. She explains that we must not treat introversion as something that should be "cured" or changed, and provides insight into ways of bridging a "communication gap" between introverts and extroverts.

In short, Susan Cain makes a very good case for quiet leadership and thoughtful solitude. She affirms that even the soft-spoken contemplatives of the

Introducing Susan Cain

Born in 1968, Susan Cain is an American writer and lecturer who is generating a lot of discussion with her ideas about the power of introverts. A graduate of Princeton University and Harvard Law School, Cain left her career as an attorney to pursue a quieter life of writing. In 2015, she co-founded the Quiet Revolution, a company with initiatives in parenting, education, and the workplace. Cain devotes much of her free time to solitary pursuits such as reading and writing, and enjoys traveling the world with her husband and two children.

Cain's Introvert and Extrovert Defined

The terms introvert and extrovert were popularized in the 1921 book *Psychological Types*, by Carl Jung. Jung used the terms to describe two very distinct personality types: the gregarious extrovert who is most comfortable in a large social group, and the reflective introvert who finds comfort and peace in spending time alone.

But can complex human beings be divided into these two simple categories? Susan Cain makes reference to a number

of contemporary researchers that support her in a resounding "NO!" She argues that

Introversion and extroversion interact with our other personality traits and personal histories, producing wildly different kinds of people. - Susan Cain

introversion and extraversion are like two opposing ends of a spectrum. While she agrees with many traditional assumptions about introverts and extroverts (see table below), she

reminds the reader that introvert/extrovert "behavior is [not] predictable across all circumstances".

Cain insists on not getting "hung up" on definitions, but instead places importance on using this new, more flexible understanding of introversion and extroversion to "improve relationships with others" and to just feel more "entitlement to be yourself".



Carl Jung, author of the book *Psychological Types*

ambivert

noun am·bi·vert \ 'am-bi-,vərt\

: a person having characteristics of both extrovert and introvert

Typical Characteristics of Extroverts and Introverts

As summarized by Susan Cain (pp. 11-12 *Quiet*, 2012)

Extroverts	Introverts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> comfortable with high levels of stimulation ("meeting new people, skiing slippery slopes, and cranking up the stereo") energized by contact with people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> comfortable with low levels of stimulation ("sipping wine with a close friend, solving a crossword puzzle, or reading a book") energized by solitude
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tackle assignments quickly make fast decisions, comfortable multitasking and taking risks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> work slowly and deliberately focus on one task at a time, able to concentrate for extended periods of time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> socially assertive and dominant prefer talking to listening, often speak before thinking comfortable with conflict "think out loud and on their feet" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> socially quiet and reserved prefer listening to speaking, think before they speak tend to dislike conflict "have a horror of small talk, but enjoy deep discussions"

Susan Cain points out that there are a few things introverts are not (pp. 11-12, *Quiet*, 2012):

"The word *introvert* is not a synonym for hermit or misanthrope. Introverts *can* be these things, but most are perfectly friendly."

"Nor are all introverts necessarily shy. You can also, of course be both shy *and* an introvert."

Key Concepts from Susan Cain's *Quiet*

The Myth of Charismatic Leadership

Research has proven that people who are talkative and outgoing are usually regarded as better looking, more intelligent, and more suitable for leadership. On teams and in group work, those who talk more will often be given more favorable evaluations by peers, even though there is no connection between fast-talking and an individual's intelligence.

In fact, Cain's argument and supporting research convinces the reader of the opposite. An introvert's willingness to listen and be thoughtful before acting, makes her especially good for leadership in such areas as financial investment, where risk and hasty decisions is known to get individuals and sometimes whole organizations into trouble.

In addition, the increased thoughtfulness and persistence of introverts gives them a greater capacity to work independently in creative milieus like technological innovation and the arts.

Beware the New Groupthink

Many successful introverts like Albert Einstein and Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak who have stated publicly that they work better alone than in teams. Cain provides surprising research that introverts, and even extroverts, are more likely to produce their best creative ideas outside of the brainstorming and group collaboration that have been adopted by most schools and organizations.

She suggests that "if [organizations] want the wisdom of the crowd, gather it electronically, or in writing, and make sure people can't see each other's ideas until everyone has had a chance to contribute", (p. 256, *Quiet*, 2012). In this way, even the quietest of thinkers will have their ideas presented. Cain is not calling for the abolishment of group work, but instead a more flexible approach to it. She agrees that face-to-face contact is essential, but that generating ideas in groups will inevitably be excluding some of the greatest thinking.

Pseudo-extroversion & The Free Trait Theory

Cain devotes a section of the book to explaining the biological reasons behind introversion and extroversion. She asserts that the brain's emotional center, the amygdala, can be overruled by rational thinking from our prefrontal cortex. For example, even though an individual may be painfully shy, through reason he can engage in conversation by sheer will in a case of mind over matter. This is what Cain defines as Pseudo-extroversion; the introvert "pretending" to be an extrovert.

But why would an introvert drain himself intentionally of energy to act in a manner that is out of character and uncomfortable? Cain's Free Trait Theory suggests that introverts will step beyond their comfort zones to pursue ambitions such as public speaking for work, or volunteering for a charity. (She also provides a striking commentary on the correlation of the rise of the extrovert ideal and the prescription of anti-anxiety medication. Might it be that a great percentage of anti-anxiety drugs are prescribed for introverts?) Assuming a "false persona" for any length of time will eventually wear the introvert down, and he will find it necessary to compensate with what Cain calls "restorative niches" like closing the office door at work or saying no to social functions.

Where do you fall on the introvert-extrovert spectrum?**Answer the following True or False.**

1. I prefer one-on-one conversations to group activities.
2. I often prefer to express myself in writing.
3. I enjoy solitude.
4. I seem to care less than my peers about wealth, fame, and status.
5. I dislike small talk, but I enjoy talking in depth about topics that matter to me.
6. People tell me that I'm a good listener.
7. I'm not a big risk-taker.
8. I enjoy work that allows me to "dive in" with few interruptions.
9. I like to celebrate birthdays on a small scale, with only one or two close friends or family members.
10. People describe me as "soft-spoken" or "mellow".
11. I prefer not to show or discuss my work with others until it is finished.
12. I dislike conflict.
13. I do my best work on my own.
14. I tend to think before I speak.
15. I feel drained after being out and about, even if I've enjoyed myself.
16. I often let calls go through to voicemail.
17. If I had to choose, I'd prefer a weekend with absolutely nothing to do to one with too many things scheduled
18. I don't enjoy multitasking.
19. I can concentrate easily.
20. In classroom situations, I prefer lectures to tutorials.

Notable Quotes:

from Susan Cain

"There's zero correlation between being the best talker and having good ideas."

Whoever you are, bear in mind that appearance is not reality. Some people act like extroverts, but the effort costs them in energy, authenticity, and even physical health.

"Come out of your shell" That noxious expression that fails to appreciate that some animals naturally carry shelter wherever they go, and that some humans are just the same.

Don't mistake assertiveness or eloquence for good ideas.

from other famous introverts:

In a gentle way, you can shake the world.

-Mahatma Gandhi

I restore myself when I am alone.

-Marilyn Monroe

Quiet people have the loudest minds.

-Stephen Hawking

Results: "The more often you answered True, the more introverted you probably are", (p. 14, *Quiet*, 2012)

Critical Evaluation

“It should be required reading for introverts who could use a boost to their self esteem.” - Forbes.com

Susan Cain’s *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can’t Stop Talking* is an approachable, easy read that has the potential to empower introverts and those who know them. Writing in the first person, she relates personal experiences and observations of how Western culture covets the gregarious extrovert over the thoughtful introvert.

Her division of the book into sections is helpful, starting with the basics. She establishes chronologically how the definition of *introvert* and *extrovert* has developed over the last century, and how the industrial revolution and even the internet have impacted on our perceptions of these personality types.

Once she has laid the groundwork, Cain continues with more complex psychological research and scientific fact to support her commentary. She writes clearly to explain supporting research in plain language, which makes her arguments accessible to anyone, and not just those in the scientific and psychological fields. She asserts that contemporary organizations’ penchant for teamwork and group collaboration is actually detrimental to the creative process, and with the research she cites to support this idea, I find myself won-

dering why we are only just now making these connections. Cain would likely argue that it’s taken so long for this novel idea to materialize, because it’s coming from an introvert. She writes candidly of her own experiences being an introvert, and makes mention of many other successful introverts who have influenced and lead organizations and even nations of people. The result is certainly affirming for the introverted reader, and no doubt, sheds light on the realities of the extroverted reader as well.

From well-supported, inspiring, but revolutionary ideas, Cain ends with 16 questions that help the reader think about, process, and then apply some of the information she has provided. She gives tips for parents and teachers of introverted children, and even advice for introverts on public speaking. Cain herself took public speaking lessons to prepare for the promotion of this book..

As an introvert myself, this book is not only an interesting read, but also affirming and inspiring. I expect to read and refer to this book over and over again.

Whether you’re an introvert yourself or an extrovert who loves or works with one, I hope you’ll benefit personally from the insights in the book.

- S. Cain

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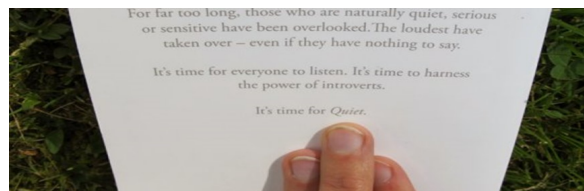
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Recommendations:

Online viewing:

Susan Cain’s TED talk about the power of introverts

https://www.ted.com/talks/susan_cain_the_power_of_introverts

Online exploring:

Susan Cain’s websites:

<http://www.ThePowerofIntroverts.com>

<http://www.quietrev.com>

Reading:

For a list of popular books on introversion:

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/3260326-introvert-power>