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Introverts -- You Have Only One Tank Of Gas, But So Do Bezos And Gates!



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Photo: GETTY

Let's explore the issue of "energy" as an introvert. I remember the first time I took a personality test and it told me I was an introvert. I really didn't like that term. Initially, I wanted to be an extrovert — someone outgoing with endless energy who's quick to answer questions and be the first on the dance floor. But that wasn't me. I enjoyed being calm and reserved, I wanted to think before I answered questions and I definitely didn't care to be first on the dance floor. I had energy, but was it enough to compete with extroverts? Absolutely, but with some caveats!

To understand the issue of energy to an introvert and its impact on "behavior and success," we have to look at key aspects of introversion. Forget the stereotypical definition: someone who is consistently withdrawn, aloof, disengaged and on the sidelines. Instead, the best way to look at introverts is to understand that their energy comes from within, largely because that's where they focus.

Different Fuel

A good analogy for the differences between introverts and extroverts is to think about a gas tank in a car. Extroverts get their energy from others, as that's their focus, so they have a seemingly endless supply of energy, an endless tank or multiple tanks of gas. An introvert, on the other hand, is like a car with but one tank of gas. So, if you're an introvert, you have to monitor your energy level (your internal gas gauge) and conserve energy when you can to minimize "recharging." How do introverts recharge? Options include, but are not limited to:

- Meditate or practice a short-term "quieting of the mind"
- Go for a walk, read a book or just spend some time alone
- Be an active listener to quiet your internal voice
- Delegate or simply do fewer tasks, but do them better
- Get a good night's sleep (this should be considered mandatory)
- Listen to soothing music to relax or upbeat music for a quick lift

Personally, I simply need to sit quietly and close my eyes for 15-20 minutes in the afternoon and I'm good to go until the evening. Add deep breathing and your tank can refill quickly.

The Introverted Leader

Do lack-of-range issues lessen your competitiveness or chances of success as an introvert? Absolutely not. Just ask Jeff Bezos ([the richest man in the world](#)), Bill Gates (No. 2) and the endless list of high achievers who are introverts. But being an introverted leader does require that you recognize the related energy issues and utilize various conservation and recharge options.

Know your energy conservation mode. The key for introverts is to manage their energy and not spend it when it's not needed. This "energy conservation" state is necessary to extend range, to maintain a reserve. But this mode comes with a "laid-back" look that can send the wrong message and can be viewed by others as an indicator someone is low-energy or disengaged. Be aware of this and, in turn, don't judge others by how they recharge.

Watch your body language. When you're in energy conservation mode, you can look tired and uninterested in what's going on. So, sit up, lean-in, look involved and smile more. Remember, body language accounts for a lot in in-person communications and often carries more weight than the words you speak. People are watching!

Take a page out of athletes' playbook. Think of elite and introverted athletes like Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant — top athletes who performed on the basketball court at ultra-elite levels. Off the court, they were always looking to recharge. Before competitions, many top introverted athletes can be seen relaxing, sitting alone, with headsets on listening to music. For introverted business professionals, this same approach (or any of the recharging methods listed above) can help you get your head in the game.

Introversion is a behavioral "preference." This means it's a tendency — not an absolute. In other words, it's what we do more often than its opposite,

extraversion. So, you may be introverted, but you can show extroverted traits when needed. Much like an actor can pretend to be someone else. But, remember, it's a drain on your gas tank to "pretend" to be an extrovert. It will work for some period of time, if needed and if you've managed your energy properly. So, next time you see someone looking reserved and relaxed, remember, there's quite possibly a top performer in there waiting to go on stage.

The Benefits Of Being An Introvert

For their book *The CEO Next Door*, Elena Botelho and Kim Powell interviewed thousands of leaders. They found that self-described introverts exceeded their boards' expectations more often than extroverts. Introversion is an asset and a core trait — one we'll carry with us our entire lives. So, embrace your introversion and its many benefits. Based on my own experiences as an introverted business leader and having coached dozens of successful introverts, I've gleaned that these characteristics carry the following benefits:

- Introverts are often good listeners and highly observant, which allows them to gain deep insight into issues.
- Introverts often think before they speak, which helps them make more informed decisions.
- Introverts are often self-sufficient, which means they work well with others and alone.
- Introverts can cultivate deep relationships, which allows them to have a better understanding of others.
- Introverts are often self-aware and good at recognizing their strengths and weaknesses, which helps them exceed expectations.

Lastly, remember that personality tests don't always measure assertiveness (often misconstrued as extroversion). This is more of a learned skill that can be a powerful differentiator for introverts and help address the appearance of a lack of

energy. Add a little assertiveness (being self-aware and determined) to an introvert who can manage their energy and you have an impressive individual and leader, one with what is often called presence. Why? This is what sets many introverts apart, having this "quiet strength."

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