

# THE DYNAMIC INTROVERT

LEADING  
QUIETLY  
WITH  
PASSION  
AND  
PURPOSE

LESLEY  
TAYLOR

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Many of the comments and stories in the book come from dynamic introverts who participated in my on-line survey. Your stories make the book come alive and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Thanks also to all of you who sent me articles, links, blog posts and information about introverts and introversion.

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this book to all of  
the introverts who quietly make the world a better place.

# Preface

The idea for this book evolved from a conversation with a fellow introvert. That initial conversation left me yearning for more knowledge and understanding as to what it means to be an introvert in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I hope that the book will spark a similar reaction in you.

Although I've been an introvert all of my life I had not given much thought to this aspect of my personality until early in 2012. In the course of researching and writing *The Dynamic Introvert* I discovered that I was not alone, that in fact, many people do not give much thought to whether they are introverted or extroverted. This may not be a challenge for extroverts as much of the world seems to be designed with them in mind. But—as I suggest throughout the book—introverts need to become more aware and conscious of their introversion. As with many things in life, introversion can be a “double edged sword”. Our personality can result in challenges, especially if we aspire to be leaders, but it will also give us the edge that we need in order to succeed in our rapidly changing world.

I hope you will find this book a valuable reference and I would like to hear from you as to how you've put the ideas into practice.

I encourage you to visit the website [www.thedynamicintrovert.com](http://www.thedynamicintrovert.com) where you will find additional resources and

an invitation to become part of a growing community of dynamic introverts who are providing extraordinary leadership around the world.

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# Author's Note

The terms introversion and extraversion are credited to Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung. For the purpose of this book I will be using the layperson's spelling of introvert and extrovert unless I use a direct quote that includes an alternate spelling in it. As introversion and extroversion exist on a continuum, most people's personalities fall somewhere between the two. The word ambivert describes someone whose personality is a balance of both introversion and extroversion.

You may notice that I don't use the term introvertism. It is sometimes used interchangeably with introversion but it is not as popular. A recent Google search showed over one million results for the word introversion and only 10,900 results for the word introvertism.

There are numerous definitions of introversion and many of them describe introverts in a narrow way. A common misperception is that an introvert is a shy, reticent, and typically self-centered person. Many introverts find this characterization to be negative and not representative of how they see themselves. In my research I discovered that introverts describe themselves in many different ways and refuse to be limited by the more traditional definitions.

I recognize that there is much more to our personalities than just the introversion and extroversion continuum but it is beyond the scope of this book to go into detail about the range of personality types. There are many excellent resources available in print and online for readers who want to learn more about their personalities.





# Introduction

"I THINK MANY OF US ARE DYNAMIC.  
WE JUST MAKE LESS FUSS AND NOISE ABOUT BEING DYNAMIC  
THAN SOME EXTRAVERTS. OUR ENERGY AND ENTHUSIASM IS  
OFTEN HIDDEN FROM THE EXTERNAL WORLD."

Dr. Judy Curson<sup>1</sup>

What is a dynamic introvert? Is a dynamic introvert an oxymoron, two words that seemingly contradict one another (think jumbo shrimp) or can introverts really be dynamic?

As I began to explore what it meant to be an introvert I discovered that introverts identify themselves in surprisingly different ways. There are self-described social introverts, extroverted introverts, quiet introverts, conscious introverts, fearless introverts and accessible introverts.

In contrast, a quick look at the thesaurus suggests that introverts are cool, collected, introspective, bashful, withdrawn, and solitary. More often than not it is these words that we associate with introverted behaviour. I also believe that we see what we want or expect to see so it is no wonder that we only see the quiet, reserved introverts in our lives. We tend to overlook the more dynamic introverts among us, perhaps believing that the more social of us are really extroverts and not introverts at all.

My leadership journey began many years ago. As a child I loved building forts in our basement and in the rafters of the car port. I also loved exploring on my own. For a time when I was 8 years old we lived in a rural area and I would disappear for hours by myself. We had farmland and a peat bog behind us and the Fraser River across the road in front of our house so I had lots of places to investigate. One of my favourite memories involves spending time on my own quietly exploring the peat bog in winter. The land between the farm I lived on and the bog was populated with large evergreen trees and when it snowed I would spend hours staying dry under the trees hidden away from the world.

Looking back I realize that I was fearless in my solo explorations but my courage vanished once I was in school. You see I was terrified of being called upon by my teachers to answer questions in front of other students. At that age, I had no idea that I was an introvert.

As I got older I looked forward to attending university but when I arrived there I struggled with having to give presentations and ended up choosing classes in which I could avoid speaking in front of my peers. It wasn't until I had graduated and started working as a professional social worker that it finally dawned on me that my fear of being the centre of attention was affecting my ability to advance my career.

As a first step I decided that I needed to overcome my fear of public speaking. In my workplace, social workers and psychologists met monthly to discuss journal articles or share cases. I was impressed by the ease with which some of my colleagues could stand in front of the group and present and I vowed to myself that one day I would be able to do that too.

Despite being uncomfortable in the spotlight, I took every opportunity I could to practise public speaking. That

was thirty years ago and today I am comfortable and at ease speaking in front of a group when I have had time to prepare, although my preference at heart is to sit back and observe.

Of course being able to speak to a group is only one of the skills required of leaders in today's rapidly changing society. Most workplaces demand skills outside the comfort zone of many introverts: working in and leading teams, networking, self-promotion, working quickly or multi-tasking, and dealing with conflict, to name a few. As you will discover in this book, these are all skills that can be learned. And when we are engaged in something that we feel passionate about, it is easier to excel in areas in which we would normally not feel at ease.

I discovered this many times as my career progressed. My passion for what I was doing enabled me to move into informal leadership roles that I otherwise would have avoided. These informal roles were important stepping stones to a number of exciting opportunities that were presented to me as I moved forward in my career.

If you are not already in a leadership position, you can still step up and lead. I am talking about the difference between formal and informal leadership here. Formal leadership roles are the ones that are typically recognized through job descriptions, salary, status, and position in an organization's hierarchy. The chief executive officer or CEO, executive director, vice president, board member and management positions are examples but there will be others depending on the organization and the industry in which you work.

In contrast, informal leadership is leadership that may not be officially sanctioned but is still very important to an organization's success. To be an effective informal leader you need to be respected by the people with whom you work and able to use your personal influence to engage them.

And as I learned from my own experience there are different ways that we can provide informal leadership.

When organizations are in flux there is always work that needs to be done. For whatever reason, these important roles go unfulfilled. At university I discovered that I have a passion for community and organizational development but as a clinical social worker this type of work was not part of my job description and so was out of reach. I overcame this obstacle by volunteering with various community agencies where I was able to develop my leadership skills.

It didn't take long before the opportunity arose for me to showcase these skills in my workplace. At the time I was working in a small urban hospital. It was a period of rapid change but the hospital did not have the resources to support an organizational development department and so I offered to lead team building retreats for my own department and then strategic planning sessions for other departments. Despite the fact that these initiatives were not in my job description, people noticed the leadership that I was providing and this recognition led to future career opportunities. I will share some of these experiences in later chapters.

Despite being encouraged to take on formal leadership roles I never considered how being an introvert factored into the leadership equation. That awareness came years later when one of my managers expressed the opinion that, because I am an introvert, I would never be a good leader. I also didn't realize that my boss was not alone in thinking that extroverts make better leaders than introverts.

At the time I didn't pay much attention to what he had said, but his words must have resonated because I found myself reflecting on them while conducting research for *The Dynamic Introvert*. The idea of writing about introversion and leadership

had not occurred to me until I was introduced to the topic in 2012 by Mike Johnson, a student in one of my leadership courses. Mike urged me to read Jennifer Kahnweiler's book *The Introverted Leader*<sup>2</sup> and it was at that point that I realized that introverted people do, in fact, make excellent leaders.

My purpose in writing this book is to help you reframe the way you think about yourself as an introvert and as a leader. As an introvert you no longer have to hide your true self or pretend to be an extrovert in order to get ahead in the world. As a dynamic introvert you can be a force for positive change by building on your quiet strengths.

Throughout this book I have shared my own stories in addition to those of friends and colleagues. I have changed the names of some of the people involved in order to preserve their privacy. I have also included quotes from 50 self-described introverts who participated in a leadership and introversion survey that I conducted in 2012.

This online survey provided a rich source of data, and quotes from the participants illustrate the ideas I put forward in this book. I also collected information about introversion from other sources, including a focus group and one-to-one interviews with a diverse group of introverts whom I know both personally and professionally.

I am deeply grateful for the information that I received from experts such as Adam Grant, Ralph Kilman, Stacey Doepner-Hove, Denise Buchanan, Ann Vanderbijl, Rosalie Boulter, Barbara Hughes, and Judy Curson who responded to my questions by sharing their knowledge and providing additional resources and suggestions.

I would also like to acknowledge the many organizations that have given me permission to link to their websites. You will find a list of these resources in the Notes section of this book.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introverts are Quiet Leaders

“TO BE DYNAMIC IS TO BE EVER CHANGING,  
EVER GROWING, EVER DEVELOPING.”

James B. Pratt, Jr.<sup>1</sup>

Recently I found myself scanning local job postings to see which qualities organizations were looking for in their prospective leaders. I was surprised by the number of advertisements that included the word dynamic in them. I also noticed that the search for dynamic workers was not limited to the ranks of leaders. A local storage company has been running an ad on the radio with the aim of finding dynamic employees. But what exactly are they looking for? What does it mean to be dynamic?

One of my favorite definitions is from self-described introvert and blogger James B. Pratt Jr. The qualities that Mr. Pratt describes at the beginning of this chapter can apply to both introverts and extroverts alike. Adjectives such as positive, full of energy and brimming with new ideas also describe those of us who are dynamic. But extroverts are more likely to express their dynamic natures openly, while introverts, as described by Dr. Judy Curan in the introduction to this book, “hide their energy and enthusiasm from the external world”.

This is unfortunate because employers looking for dynamic leaders are more likely to search for individuals who are outwardly positive, extroverted, charming, and energetic. They are not looking for people who are quiet and reflective. Perhaps it is time to rethink or reframe how we want our leaders to behave. What are the most important qualities for leaders in the 21st century? These are questions being asked by Human Resource experts across the globe as they scramble to prepare the next generation of leaders.

In 2008, the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD) proclaimed, “There is a looming leadership crisis in the West.” This attention-getting quote refers to the leadership crisis that is predicted to occur when managers and leaders from the baby boom generation retire. In the document “Engaging Leadership”<sup>2</sup> the CIPD sounds the alarm that the “shrinking talent pool from which future leaders will be drawn is diminishing.”

One of the assumptions in *The Dynamic Introvert* is that introverts make up a large part of this “shrinking talent pool” and yet their leadership potential often goes unnoticed. I believe that the “pool” is actually larger than people originally thought and—given the opportunity—introverts will step in and fill the looming leadership gap.

In order for this to happen though, organizations must recognize that introverts already make up a sizable portion of their workforce despite the incorrect assumption that introverts are in the minority.

In 2002, when Marty Olsen Laney wrote the best-seller *The Introvert Advantage*,<sup>3</sup> it was believed that only one-third of the general population had introverted tendencies. We now know that introverts make up as much as one-half

of the population.<sup>4</sup> Despite this fact, “extraverts are more likely to be chosen for leadership positions”.<sup>5</sup>

As I began my search for answers to this conundrum, I came across a leadership website<sup>6</sup> for introverts. In 2009, Dr. Judy Curson, one of the site’s originators, was inspired to take action when she read the following passage in her son’s physical education textbook:

People can be divided into two identified types:<sup>7</sup>

- Introverts—these are people who are quiet and self-centered, not high in confidence, not looking to lead
- Extroverts—confident and outgoing people with high opinions of themselves, they tend to be leaders

Dr. Curson, who identifies herself as an introvert, was concerned that the above description was misleading and potentially damaging to the students who read the textbook. Her concerns led to her own search for information on introversion and leadership. With the help of colleague Cassy Taylor, Dr. Curson was able to secure funding from the South Central Strategic Health Authority and the Welsh government to develop the leadership website. The site, which is a valuable source of information for both introverts and those wanting to “coach, support, manage, and work with them” has been well received and is being used as a resource for post graduate medical education in the U.K.<sup>8</sup>

## WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL LEADER?

Many of the misconceptions about introversion and leadership may reflect the fact that there is considerable confusion about leadership in general. A recent Google search using the word leadership turned up 639,000,000 responses and an Amazon search showed 148,751 books in the leadership category. But, as David Rock notes, “there are still huge gaps in our understanding of leadership.”<sup>9</sup>

As far back as 1945,<sup>10</sup> researchers at Ohio State University began studying the behaviour of leaders in order to discover what differentiated successful leaders from unsuccessful ones. They found that there were no specific traits that could be attributed to outstanding leaders: some leaders were energetic and quick thinking, while others were quiet and modest.

More recently, James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner wrote *The Leadership Challenge*, a practical leadership book based on over 25 years of research into what makes leaders great. Their research revealed that “leadership is an identifiable set of skills and abilities that are available to all of us.”<sup>11</sup> In *The Dynamic Introvert*, I will explore some of the skills that introverts can develop in order to become effective leaders.

In 2009, a team of researchers led by Adam Grant<sup>12</sup> found that introverted leaders can be more effective than extroverted leaders in situations of rapid change especially when there is a need to engage everyone in the organization in finding innovative solutions to problems and new ways of doing business.

But the question still remains: if leadership is less about charisma and more about developing relationships and bringing out the best in people, why do we continue to believe so strongly that extroverts make the best leaders?

## WHY EXTROVERTS SUCCEED

While evidence suggests that the preference for extroverts as leaders exists in all sectors of society, let's consider, as an example, one survey from the world of business. Nearly two-thirds of 1,542 senior managers surveyed in 2006 saw introversion as an impediment to reaching higher management levels.<sup>13</sup> Extroverts, it would seem, are deemed by virtue of their outgoing style to be more intelligent and therefore chosen for more leadership opportunities than are introverts, even though extroverts may not be the most appropriate leaders in every situation. More recently Adam McHugh wrote, "There may be no other feature of American life that contains as much bias toward extroversion as leadership."<sup>14</sup>

Thankfully, this widely held bias is being confronted. Daniel Quinn Mills who taught at the Harvard Business School for many years both acknowledges this bias and challenges its premise. "We perceive talkers as smarter than quiet types even though GPA (Grade Point Average) and SAT (college entry exam) and IQ test scores reveal this perception to be inaccurate."<sup>15</sup>

Jonathan Rauch, journalist and activist, writing in *The Atlantic* in 2003, makes the strong statement that introverts "are among the most misunderstood groups in America, possibly the world."<sup>16</sup> There are many reasons why this is the case and I will explore some of these in more detail in the chapters that follow.

My own perception is that introverts are misunderstood because we have had to pretend to be extroverts in order to succeed in life. Pretending begins early in life. From a young age many of us are encouraged by parents and teachers to be more extroverted in order to fit in at school. This

expectation that introverts will do better in society as extroverts continues as we move from the classroom setting into the workplace.

In a world that values extroversion over introversion and leaders are expected to be persuasive, assertive, outgoing, and quick thinking, many introverts have had to suppress their natural tendencies.

What does this do to introverts who are not allowed to be true to themselves? There are often emotional consequences for the individual who must take on the persona of someone that he or she is not. As I point out in Chapter Three, this acting out of character can be stressful and potentially lead to burnout if it goes on too long.

Some introverts may actually prefer a level of anonymity. In my own experience I've always been more comfortable sharing the limelight than taking the credit for myself. However, I acknowledge that I feel a sense of satisfaction when people recognize my contributions and I have been fortunate, over the course of my career, to have had my leadership potential recognized by a number of senior leaders.

Jennifer Kahnweiler writes about turning a perceived weakness into a strength. "One well-respected manager was given feedback in his career that he was too low-key. In his future role as a senior leader he turned this laid-back persona into a presence. He had a strong ability to project a calm confidence—a sense of ease, poise, and self-assurance that transferred to all the people around him."<sup>17</sup>

I can relate to Kahnweiler's anecdote because I've been told that I have the ability to restore calm to a chaotic situation just by entering a room! We will delve into the importance of presence when we look at personal branding in Chapter Four.



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“I have had six successful careers and become a leader in each one. My strengths are interest in people, communication skills, innovation, analysis, planning and follow through. All of these have benefited from my being an introvert, who thinks before he speaks, delivers on what he says, includes others in planning and builds trust.” *Survey Participant*

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## IT TAKES COURAGE TO LEAD

Sir Winston Churchill once said, “Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen”.<sup>18</sup> The late British prime minister was referring to the need for balance: sitting down and listening is as important as standing up and speaking. But, somehow our extroverted society has favoured speaking over listening. Introverts, who are more comfortable listening, are fully capable of providing leadership but as a necessary first step that they must find the courage to “stand up and speak.”

Dr. Brené Brown, who teaches at the University of Houston, writes about vulnerability and leadership. She describes a courageous act as one that involves showing up and being seen.<sup>19</sup> This may not always be easy for introverts but crucial if we are assuming leadership roles in society.

Courage comes when we trust ourselves to know when it is the right time to speak up and when it is best to listen. From my perspective, gaining courage begins with knowing who we are and what we can contribute. We must be able to visualize how we want to show up in the world and what impact we want to have. We have to be honest with ourselves

about our strengths and weaknesses and analyze what gets in the way of our becoming who we want to be. This self-confidence will provide a strong foundation from which to lead.

According to author Nancy Okerlund, the process of becoming more aware of who we are is powerful: she refers to this as “conscious introversion.”<sup>20</sup> Of course Okerlund is referring to personal awareness in this quote but thanks to Susan Cain and other writers, there is a growing understanding in society about introversion in general.

## THE INTROVERTED BRAND

Another reason that introverts might be overlooked is that we don’t always realize we are capable of managing our personal brand or how important this is to our future success. We may inadvertently allow other people to make assumptions about us and this may not work in our favour, especially if we want to take on leadership roles. Promoting ourselves starts with an understanding of who we are: our personality, our interests, our skills and our values. It also means determining what success means to us.

Personal branding is not a new idea; in fact the term was coined by Tom Peters in a 1997 *Fast Company* article entitled “The Brand Called You.”<sup>21</sup> As an introvert you need to take control of how you are perceived and brand yourself before someone else does. Do you want to be known as a meek, anti-social and ineffective leader? Or can you project yourself as a dynamic introvert who is quiet at times, creative, collaborative, and effective—a leader who listens to people and helps them do their best work?

Whatever your brand, it has to be authentic. We’ll take a closer look in Chapter Three at the meaning of authenticity and how this contributes to becoming a dynamic introvert.

## SELF-AWARENESS, SELF-MANAGEMENT & REFLECTION

Referring to the importance of developing our emotional intelligence, author Daniel Goleman states “From self-awareness—understanding one’s emotions and being clear about one’s purpose—flows self-management, the focused drive that all leaders need to achieve their goals.”<sup>22</sup> Being emotionally intelligent and finding the time for introspection are now considered keys to leading a successful life and is increasingly expected in our leaders.

One advantage that introverts have over extroverts is our ability to stop and reflect on our experiences. It’s not that extroverts can’t and don’t do this: it is just that introverts are hard wired to slow down, reflect and think before speaking. We know that introverts prefer quiet time and solitude in order to process the information that they are receiving. This time for reflection is necessary for learning and creativity and it improves decision-making.

Leadership expert Margaret Wheatly<sup>23</sup> challenges her readers to stop and reflect on the experiences that they are having and to make it possible for others to do the same. This may not be as challenging or difficult as we may think. As we become more comfortable voicing our own need for reflection, we can encourage others to follow our lead.

### RETHINKING THE WAY WE LOOK AT INTROVERTS

What would happen if we reframed the way we look at introversion? What if we were to recognize and reward the positive elements of this personality trait? What if organizations were to realize the unique benefits that dynamic introverts provide?

First things first. We need to better understand the term introversion.

Until about a decade ago there was little understanding of introversion and few books published in the popular press. Introversion and shyness were often confused with each other. Even today you will find people using the words introversion and shyness interchangeably. But the two are not the same.

Shyness is a fear and avoidance of social situations. Unlike introverts who feel energized by spending time alone, shy people often want to connect with others but are afraid to do so. Both introverts and extroverts can be shy. The Shyness Research Institute<sup>24</sup> at Indiana University Southeast has a website with a number of tools and resources to help shy people understand and overcome their shyness.

There is, however, a close resemblance between introversion and sensitivity. In a Psychology Today blog post Elaine Aron explains that “both introverts and Highly Sensitive Persons (HSPs) reflect deeply, like meaningful conversations, and need lots of down time. Thus it is not surprising that 70% of HSPs are introverts. But that means 30% are extraverts.”<sup>25</sup> Dr. Aron is the author of the best-selling book *The Highly Sensitive Person*.<sup>26</sup> You will find a self-test to help you determine how sensitive you are on her website.<sup>27</sup>

Much of the writing on introversion and leadership focuses on how introverts can become more extroverted or what professor Brian Little refers to as “pseudo extroversion”.<sup>28</sup> As an introvert I acknowledge that we need to flex our extroverted selves from time to time, especially when we step into leadership positions. But we also need to recognize that as introverts we have our own strengths: qualities that are desperately needed in our loud, intrusive and demanding world.

In Chapter Two, we explore the strengths and the quiet power of introverted leaders. We will also review new research that demonstrates why introverts may make the best leaders in contemporary organizations. Chapter Three focuses on how we manage our personal energy: it is the one thing that readily differentiates introverts from extroverts. Chapter Four describes how personal branding is a key strategy for introverts wanting to excel and advance in their careers. In Chapter Five we delve into the main areas that organizations must focus on to successfully engage introverts. Chapter Six provides resources and information so that you can develop your own personal leadership development plan.

The final chapter explores why and how a more introverted society is gradually evolving and how dynamic introverts can lead this quiet revolution. Finally, I offer some thoughts for young introverts starting out in their careers.

Throughout the book I encourage you to *stop and reflect* through the use of self-coaching questions that will enable you to learn from your own experiences.

## IT'S TIME FOR A SEA CHANGE

Our understanding of and beliefs about leadership have evolved over time and there seems to be another change in the wind—a growing recognition of the important qualities that introverted leaders bring to organizations. In the past leaders were expected to be heroic and charismatic authority figures. Today, as we will see in Chapter 2, successful leaders have very different qualities and are more likely to be humble and collaborative in their approach. This is not a small, incremental change, but something with huge implications for choosing and hiring people for leadership positions.

There has never been a better time to be a leader who can be vulnerable, humble, and reflective. In other words, there has never been a better time to be a leader if you are an introvert.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Despite representing 50% of the general population there is still a lot of confusion about introverts and introversion.
- The introverted brand is unique and worth promoting.
- Recent research shows that introverts make effective leaders in times of rapid change.
- Dynamic introverts are poised to fill the leadership gap left by retiring baby boomers.
- It takes courage to lead and dynamic introverts will do this by becoming conscious of who they are and by developing their quiet leadership skills.
- It is time to rethink the way we look at introverts and to recognize and celebrate the introverts amongst us.