

The Introverted Leader

SECOND
EDITION

BUILDING ON
YOUR QUIET STRENGTH

Jennifer B. Kahnweiler, PhD

Bestselling author of
Quiet Influence and *The Genius of Opposites*

“The definitive guide for introverts to tap into their leadership potential and succeed in an extroverted world.”

— **Arianna Huffington**, Founder and CEO, Thrive Global



Foreword by Douglas R. Conant
Former President and CEO of Campbell Soup Company

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**Building on Your
Quiet Strength**

SECOND EDITION

Jennifer B. Kahnweiler, PhD

with a Foreword by
Douglas R. Conant



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The Introverted Leader

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Chapter 8

Communicating and Coaching for Results

Danielle, an experienced civil engineer, got a call from her contractor one day asking her to check on a job across town. After she pulled up to the construction site in her pickup truck, she asked Bob, the foreman, to grab a cup of coffee with her. Danielle had earned the respect of her coworker—they joked together, talked shop, and generally felt at ease with each other. As she and Bob rode together down the highway, they discussed problems with a subcontractor who had been late delivering supplies. By the time she dropped Bob off at his worksite 30 minutes later, they had formulated a plan to make the supplier accountable.

Have you ever had a productive work conversation in an informal setting? Even if it wasn't in a pickup truck, you probably found the unstructured setting made it easier to ask questions and get input. Informal settings lend themselves to the kind of low-key, low-stress conversations that introverts relish. Work flows more naturally with an established rapport.

Successful introverted leaders build on this natural inclination to meet with people one-on-one. In this chapter, I explore the ways that introverted leaders can play to their strengths as

they prepare, gain presence, push themselves, and practice communicating and coaching for results.

Prepare

Introverted leaders find their natural propensity for preparation contributes greatly to communication success. They take the time they need to think deeply about their goals for interactions, whether it is face-to-face conversations, phone calls, or meetings. Here are a few key suggestions to consider as you prepare to communicate and coach for results:

- Grow influence.
- Prepare a script of talking points.
- Ask great questions.
- Plan productive coaching sessions.

Grow Influence

Introverted leaders are known to analyze situations before emerging with a plan. When it comes to influencing others, this proves to be a real asset. Take, for example, the dilemma of Mark, a soft-spoken information technology project manager in a large accounting firm. Mark typically sent out meeting invites to the people he needed at meetings, and he assumed they would show up. In three consecutive meetings, only 50 percent of the invitees had appeared. Without the full team there, it was impossible to make decisions, and the project was quickly getting behind schedule.

During our conversations, Mark revealed that at the project's beginning, he had not made a point of explaining the scope of the project to individual team members and then gauging their commitment to it. He had assumed they understood the benefits of the project to them, to their departments, and to the firm. As we talked the situation through, Mark realized he had failed to communicate why each team member's involvement mattered. Nor had he asked explicitly for their commitment. If they were not sold on the benefits, why would team members make a priority the meetings Mark considered essential? I know I wouldn't!

Mark had a better shot at team engagement if he understood what was getting in the way of their attendance. Although it pushed on his comfort zone, he decided to talk to the team members about how they understood their contribution to the project. He built on his introverted strengths for problem solving by conducting focused, one-on-one conversations.

The time investment in connecting with his team yielded significant results. He began to better understand the pushes and pulls his team members were subjected to, and he discovered they had skills that would greatly benefit the project. By becoming a curious listener, he gained the respect of each of the eight team members. He invested in the time to meet with everyone, and the next meeting yielded 100 percent attendance!

Prepare a Script of Talking Points

Have you ever traveled internationally or tried to communicate with people who didn't know your language? If so, you probably have tried to learn a few phrases in that country's language

TOOL **Stakeholder Analysis**

As you begin thinking through the kind of support a project calls for, and how much help you’re currently getting, a methodical look at the situation can lead to better understanding. Mark used a version of a tool called a Stakeholder Analysis to help him get a clearer picture. Here is how he used it:

Based on conversations with each stakeholder, Mark determined each member’s interest in the project, the probability of their completing their part, the roadblocks they might encounter, and how critical their contributions to the project were. After the conversations, he could assign a number from 1 (low) commitment to 5 (high) commitment. That helped him determine the type of influencing and communication strategies he should plan to use with each person (see Table 5).

TABLE 5 **Stakeholder Analysis Chart (Sample)**

	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
Wei			x		
Char					x
Joe		x			
Mia				x	
Ha	x				

Based on the Stakeholder Analysis chart, Wei might need regular updates with specific questions on progress, whereas Char may need less frequent check-ins. This type of planning plays to your introvert sweet spot of analysis and planning and can minimize problems as a project unfolds.

to attempt basic conversation—or at least find the bathroom! Even if the locals smile at your speaking attempts or respond in English, trying to communicate in another’s language is a great way to break the ice.

Likewise, an introverted leader who doesn’t find it comfortable to initiate conversations can prepare a few handy phrases to make it easier. As was referenced in Chapter 7, *Networking Your Way*, crafting conversation starters is a good way to ease into the give-and-take of an informal chat or a more high-level discussion. With talking points to play from, you will be more relaxed, which could make it easier to improvise. Just as preparing for a meeting enhances your ability to achieve goals, so can having a few go-to questions and phrases to usher you into a comfort zone for extemporaneous conversations.

Pre-Number Your Comments

Gene Griessman, PhD, who wrote *The Achievement Factor*, says, “The introvert may not say much, and if they do say something, they are quickly interrupted and don’t get to finish what they say.” He uses a masterful technique that is effective for introverted leaders who get interrupted by extroverts, those folks whose energy gives them the tendency to talk out their ideas.⁵¹

His helpful practice is to pre-number comments. For example, when you can break into the conversation, say something like: “Tom made several statements I really agree with. However, I have three questions I would like to ask (or two comments or observations I’d like to make).” By sharing the number of questions or comments you have, “you are almost always able to

finish what you have to say!” Gene says. I have witnessed Gene using this technique, and people always listen attentively as he moves through his points!

Allow Time between Appointments

Preparing for your appointments is another effective way to establish productive communication. Consider blocking out 10 minutes or so between appointments to give yourself breathing room and thinking time. This also will allow you to reflect on the next call’s purpose and your desired outcome. If you feel the need to break the ice before getting down to business, jot down a few notes about what is new in your life. Recall a personal fact about the person with whom you will be conversing, which can establish rapport and demonstrate that you listened the last time you spoke to them.

As an introvert, Maxine appreciated how her manager, also an introvert, helped her showcase her talents on a project. The manager encouraged Maxine to review relevant documents before meetings, develop comments and reactions, and prepare three recommendations so that she would be fully prepared for the sessions. Maxine said this pre-work played to her preparation strength and helped her maximize her contribution.

Ask Great Questions

Seizing the power of great questions is an essential tool for communication success. Not only will excellent questions keep you focused, but asking them is also one of the best ways to unveil the information you need to make high-quality decisions.

Ravi, a CFO in a large media organization, learned the hard way how important prepared questions are. He typically formulates a list of questions before meetings to prompt his memory and help him accomplish the meeting's goals. During one important strategic planning session, he reached for his list and realized he had left it in his home office. Without his prepared questions, Ravi was thrown off center and lost confidence. Now he makes sure his questions are housed on multiple devices, including his phone. The questions help him be a more valued contributor at meetings.

Plan Productive Coaching Sessions

Having good, prepared questions also is essential when leaders are coaching employees. This important aspect of a leader's job can happen spontaneously or in more formal performance discussions, and provides the opportunity to help people reach higher performance levels. Measured, deep, one-on-one conversations play to an introverted leader's strengths.

The right questions can also foster self-awareness, help people find their own solutions to problems, and hasten personal progress. The GROW (goal, reality, options, will) method, a popular and useful coaching formula, outlines four steps that assist you in helping others discover their own solutions. Many of my introverted coaching clients have shared that they find this template very useful. Here is a brief overview:

- **Goal** Define the issue or problem.
- **Reality** Describe the situation.
- **Options** Understand possible solutions.
- **Will** Commit to an action plan.

Preparing questions that focus on each of these four steps can facilitate the coaching process. Here are sample questions to get you started in applying the GROW coaching tool.

Goal

- What do you see as the problem(s) or issue(s)?
- Of these issues, which is the most important right now?
- What do you think needs to change?
- What outcome would you like to achieve?

Reality

- What action steps have you already taken?
- What obstacles will need to be overcome?
- What resources do you have?
- What resources do you need?

Options

- What are different ways to approach the problem?
- What else can you do?
- What are the pros and cons of these options?
- Would you like to hear a suggestion from me?

Will

- What is the most viable option for you right now?
- What is the first action step you will take?
- On a scale of 1–10, what is your commitment to taking this action?
- How can I support you in reaching your goal?

Next time you have the opportunity to coach an employee, peer, customer, or client, try out these questions or some of your own and see how using them works for you.

Presence

Once they have prepared, introverted leaders excel at communicating when they

- Communicate expectations.
- Solicit input.
- Match the medium to the message.

Communicate Expectations

The importance of communicating clear expectations was underscored on a volunteer project I participated in several years ago. The project, creating a professional development workshop for a local organization, suffered from the leader's failure to define goals and roles. While team members asked for direction several times, we didn't receive clear answers. Without clear expectations

and direction, committee members operated independently, with no cohesive vision of what the outcome should be. As a result, the workshop we were planning didn't bring in the numbers of participants we had hoped for, nor did we generate the income we were anticipating. This result was not surprising.

Leaders can help drive successful projects by setting clear expectations. People need to know their destination, the road they're embarking on, and where they should invest their time. What are the priorities?

Introverted leaders are comfortable planning. They achieve strong results by clearly communicating the direction—at the start of a project and throughout its lifecycle—the vision, mission, and goals.

Written communication is a form of expression that introverts are very comfortable with. It minimizes the need for a great deal of up-front verbal explanation. A strong email with clear guidelines can be time efficient and effective. Ute, an introverted administrator at a nonprofit agency, created a form to help her stay connected to her team throughout projects. The sheet lists the name of the project, target completion date, the task list, participants, and due dates for each team member. Ute sends it via email for reactions and edits, and makes sure to include words of appreciation and encouragement with her feedback.

Solicit Input

Strong leaders know that success hinges on getting buy-in from those who will be doing the work. As was described in the previous Stakeholder Analysis, soliciting input from those people is crucial.

Erika, an introverted manager, understands the importance of inclusivity, such as soliciting the perspectives of team members who tend to be more withdrawn. She makes a point of calling on people by name to ask for their views to ensure she isn't missing out on great ideas from those who tend to be reserved. She also wants them to know their opinions count.

Cathy, an introverted leader at a large bank, typically shares ideas with her team by email first and then meets with individuals to get reactions and questions. When people know their opinion matters, they're likely to be more committed to the project. Doing this not only garners goodwill with the folks she manages, but she says the diverse input typically helps make the concept stronger.

Match the Medium to the Message

I once received a query from a reporter working on a story about people who had been fired by email. Apparently, it's not that uncommon! At the very least, it would seem engaging someone face-to-face or in a phone conversation would be a more appropriate way to deliver that difficult news. Leaders need to assess the ways they communicate, and to know which method will be the most effective for the message that needs to be delivered.

How do many introverted leaders view communication? In 2017, our company conducted a survey to learn about that. The results, based on responses from 40 introverted leaders from across different industries and job functions, were intriguing. Respondents indicated that matching the communication method with the information that needs to be delivered is essential and increases the likelihood that people will get the message.

Here is what we learned about how introverts view the vehicles of communication:

Email

Introverts often find this tool to be the most effective for delivering data, setting appointments, and dispensing other routine information. It's also a great format for disseminating relevant content before meetings and outlining a business case for a project.

One survey respondent wrote: "Email allows me to get things off my plate (delegating, responding to my team) so that I can concentrate on my most important task at hand. It also cuts down on the need for conversations that could lead to chitchat." Another observed: "I can write something and let it sit for a while, and then come back to it and make changes before I send it out." Some said email helps them be better communicators. "If I were in a telephone-dependent work era, I would never have advanced very far. Email and social channels allow me to express myself in written form."

Text Messages

Introverts use texting to get quick answers, to do on-the-spot logistical planning, and for check-ins. Group texting "conversations" are also a time-efficient way to gather different viewpoints. As with email, texting allows introverts to take the time they need to send the clearest message possible. One survey respondent said, "Texting is my greatest ally. It allows me to re-

spond quickly and intelligently. The ability to edit before hitting send (or enter) reduces my risk of misused words, something that happens often on the phone and creates enormous amounts of frustration and miscommunication.”

Telephone

This is a great tool to reinforce emails or texts. Telephone conversations are also good for connecting when you want to develop working relationships and build credibility. Your voice and tone become part of the medium. I once received a voicemail from Jared, an introverted sales member of our team, requesting that I call him. During our phone conversation, he explained a sensitive client situation that I could have easily misunderstood if he had tried to describe it in an email. Because of his communication choice, my opinion of Jared—and his credibility—rose.

The theme of preparing for these telephone conversations as a way to stay present and focused also emerged in the survey. The most popular methods for doing this are to remove distractions and to prepare questions and talking points ahead of time. Almost 60 percent of survey respondents said that they rely on these prompts to refocus the conversation when it is getting off track.

Face-to-Face Communication

Delivering important news, launching a project, praising people, or working out issues and problems can be best handled in a face-to-face conversation. CEO Paul English says that as an

introvert, it's a temptation to sit in front of his computer all day. "But if that's literally all I do, it's sucking energy out of the room. People want to engage with me. It's a lot easier to transmit energy face-to-face than to transmit it electronically."⁵²

English also keeps his calendar open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. His explanation: "At the last minute, I can just grab a few people I haven't seen in a while. Sometimes we have an agenda, but mostly it's just socializing. Without that human connection, it goes flat."

Even though introverts know that one-on-one communication is important, it was the least favorite form of communication cited by introverted leaders on our survey. Telephone conversation and face-to-face communication were used by each respondent less than 7 percent of the time, compared to 67 percent for email use and 27 percent for texting.

Know When to Avoid Face-to-Face Conversations

Introverted leaders understand that, in order to preserve energy, they must be selective about spontaneous, in-person dialogue. On several episodes of the TV show "Curb Your Enthusiasm," introverted comedian Larry David laments the times when he runs into someone unexpectedly and is forced into conversation. He calls the situation "stop and chats."⁵³ Likewise, many introverts find they are not prepared to engage in small talk when their mind is somewhere else. Superficial chatter drains their energy. Many introverts have told me that they make deliberate decisions about engaging in superficial conversation they feel is unnecessary. They decide how much attention they want to give others, based on the situation and their energy reserves.

Make Me Feel Important

We have talked about the importance of using the skill of engaged listening throughout this book. It can be too easy to slip away from being truly present. Mary Kay, founder of the eponymous cosmetics empire, believed in making everyone feel significant in conversations. She told author Gene Greissman that to do this, she imagined that everyone she was interacting with had a big sign around their neck that said, “Make Me Feel Important.”⁵⁴ The whole time she was interacting with others, she would think about how she could do that. Would a visual reminder like that help you?

Push

Introverted leaders who possess strong communication skills may make it look easy; but like actors who have focused on the discipline of learning their lines, they have likely pushed themselves out of their natural comfort zone. Here are three key ways you can push yourself to excel in communication:

- Flex your style.
- Communicate in tough times.
- Use your voice.

Flex Your Style

For introverted leaders, the challenge—and opportunity—is to develop many facets of communication. Using a more outgoing, extroverted style can feel alien to an introvert’s natural rhythm. It’s like wearing a costume that hides their true nature.

HOW TO **Communicate with Extroverts**

Extroverts tend to work through their ideas out loud, so expect to do some brainstorming.

Be prepared to jump in from time to time with extroverts. Interrupting is not considered rude.

When asked what seems like an invasive question, offer just what you are comfortable sharing.

If you are caught by surprise with a question, respond that you need a moment to consider it.

Send short emails and concise voice mails, and follow up in person with more detail if asked.

HOW TO **Communicate with Introverts**

In meetings and casual conversations, slow down, pause, and give introverts time to reflect and respond.

Because introverts need alone time, support teleworking and configuration of office space that supports quiet reflection.

Before meetings, send talking points via email or text to give introverts thinking time.

Encourage balanced participation in meetings and engage all team members. Monitor how much you speak.

If someone seems reserved or quiet, don't ask, "What's wrong?" Most likely, nothing is wrong. They are in their heads.

It's typically not much of a stretch to communicate with other introverts because you speak a similar language. But learning to communicate with both introverts and extroverts sometimes requires that you shift gears, in the same way extroverts have to learn not to be too interruptive. Learning to flex your style from speaking "introvert" to "extrovert" takes awareness and commitment. It might never feel totally natural to swing to the opposite side of your spectrum, but you can get more comfortable with switching by remembering to schedule quiet time to recharge your batteries. The How To tips on the previous page will help you build on what you do naturally. Consider pushing yourself by trying one or two methods.

Communicate in Tough Times

During times of change, it is especially important for leaders to communicate often and clearly with team members and stakeholders. Asking questions, listening to concerns, and translating new directions are key parts of your leadership role. Engaging face-to-face is not as common today as it once was, thanks to emailing and texting. As an introvert, can you expand your communication repertoire to include different types of message delivery?

Prepare and Reflect

Your go-to skill of preparation is the best place to start. Add to that a propensity for thoughtful reflection, and you can push yourself without excessively stressing out. By communicating your expectations and soliciting input (discussed earlier in the

Preparation section), you will be prepared for challenging conversations. As one leader in our communication survey put it: “You just have to ‘Do it,’ as Nike says. Tough conversations are never easy, but going into your shell and playing turtle is not solving the problem.”

Give Presentations

Presentations can be another good way to push yourself. “I hold workshops and perform presentations for my professional field,” a survey respondent said. “If it’s a topic I’m knowledgeable on, I’m much more confident. And when the attendees are looking to me for information, I don’t have to be as concerned about being talked over.”

You can also refer to the many strategies on preparing powerful presentations in Chapter 5. Finding opportunities to learn new ways of speaking in front of groups will raise your communication comfort level and make it more likely your message will be heard.

Increase the “stickiness” of your presentations with creative approaches, such as photos and storytelling. Huy made a case for upcoming company changes by incorporating personal stories from his time playing sports in school. He discovered that the more stories he told, the better his messages landed.

Use Your Calm Focus and Grounded Energy

Assets that serve introverts well in times of change and uncertainty are calm focus and grounded energy, which help people

stay centered. We look to leaders for reassurance and direction. As an introverted leader, a push strategy might be finding ways to be more visible so people can feed off your calming energy. After a recent emotionally charged national election, introverted Julia organized a group of people with diverse political viewpoints. The goal was to learn from each other and decide how to move forward in a time marked by deep divisions.

Julia stepped out of her comfort zone to enroll friends and neighbors in helping her set up the group, which grew from 6 people to 100 in four months. After the group grew organically, she pulled back on her time. Julia saw that her push toward visibility as an “out there” leader served a good cause in the start-up mode. And as a self-aware introverted leader, she wanted to honor her need to recharge and step back from the external pulls on her time. Several others in the group have stepped up to help continue the calm, open dialogue that Julia established.

Use Your Voice

Have you ever called family members or friends and picked up on their mood in the first few seconds of the call? Most likely you read their voice—its tone, volume, and pitch. When we lack visual cues, as we do on conference calls, the ability to “read” voices become more important than ever. Likewise, how you choose to use your voice can make a tremendous difference in how you are received.

One key push strategy is to use your voice’s full range to express yourself. Author and voice coach Barbara McAfee, who has worked with many introverted leaders, says that outward expression will always be a “second language” to introverts. “Even

so, it is possible to become quite conversant in that language with practice,” says Barbara, who authored the book *Full Voice*. “I use characters—such as Luciano Pavarotti or Martin Luther King Jr.—to help introverts open more power in their voices. Once they get used to the feeling of being louder and more present, we work to integrate those sounds into their everyday communication.”⁵⁵

A key push strategy is to step into new and different voices to express yourself. Just as IT pro Paul Otte pretends he is James Bond by putting on a pair of aviator sunglasses, playing different roles can help you find the voice that allows you to be heard when the situation demands it.

Others push themselves to speak up in situations outside of work. “I have to push out of my comfort zone when I take my car in to be serviced—or actually anytime I need some sort of service provided. I need to be clear, concise, and confident, otherwise they just roll right over me and take advantage,” said one survey respondent. This type of practice push helps you to transition your skill to work when the stakes may be higher. Refer to Chapter 5, *Delivering Powerful Presentations*, about other ways to use your voice for impact.

Practice

Opportunities to experiment with communication and coaching approaches are everywhere. We addressed the benefits of random conversations in Chapter 4, *Leading People and Projects*. Next time you are sitting in the airport, waiting in the grocery store line, or at a school function for your children, try striking up a conversation with a stranger. As we have said, it will offer you a

chance to learn, practice your conversational skills, and possibly make new connections.

Employ these ways to practice:

- Ask open-ended questions.
- Use the eyebrow test.
- Record yourself.

Ask Open-Ended Questions

Author Gene Griessman, mentioned earlier, employs open-ended questions to connect with others. He suggests something like, “Where is home for you?” After the person responds, you can say, “Des Moines. I have never been there. What is it like?” Let’s say they say, “It is the great plains.” So, you respond: “Do you like the plains better than the mountains?”⁵⁶

Questions keep the conversation going and strengthen your communication skills.

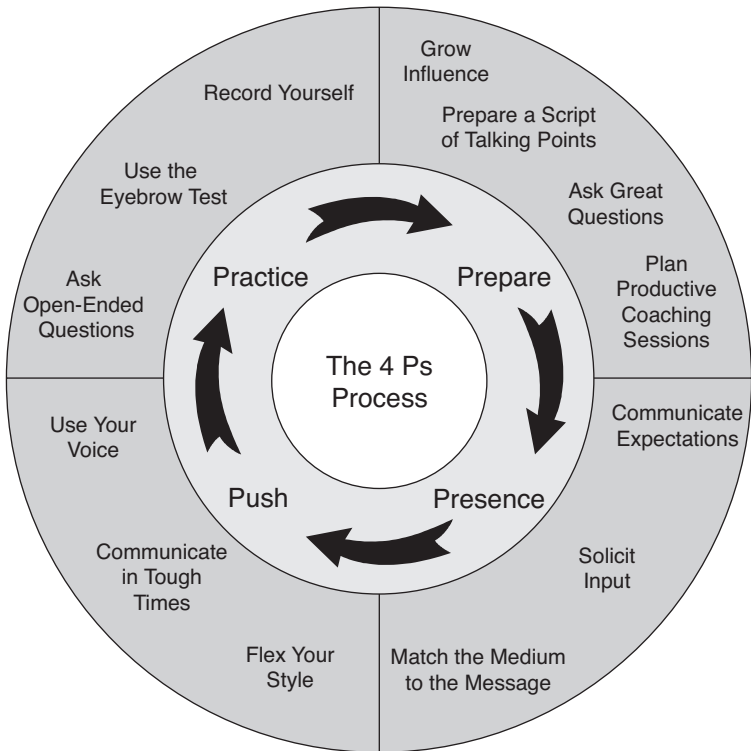
Use the Eyebrow Test

As you practice speaking and become comfortable initiating conversations, consider gathering on-the-spot feedback about your anecdotes and stories from conversational partners. Sam Horn, author of *Got Your Attention?* uses a technique called the eyebrow test. When you introduce yourself or your idea to someone for the first time, watch their eyebrows. “If their eyebrows don’t move at all, it means they’re unmoved,” she says. If their eyebrows go up, your story or pitch has succeeded. “They’re engaged, curious,” she explains. “They want to know more.”⁵⁷

Record Yourself

And finally, as you participate in dialogue and presentations, try recording the audio and/or video so you can listen back. Tune into your voice, your words, and your body language. There is absolutely no better way to enhance your communication skills than by reviewing these audios and videos. You will pick up nuances that you can change to impact how you are perceived and understood. Small behaviors make a big difference. As an introverted leader, you are probably already known as a great listener. With practice, you can tap into the full range of self-expression as you communicate and achieve tremendous results in the process.

FIGURE 9 **The 4Ps of Communicating and Coaching for Results**



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