

OPINION//OUTLOOK

# Opinion: Now is the time for quiet men

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Comments



There is growing appreciation for introverted men like Apple's Tim Cook, who listen, connect deeply and think carefully about problems.

Giulia Marchi, Bloomberg / Bloomberg

If money talks, quiet men are making a loud splash these days.

Earlier this month, self-described introvert Dharmesh Shah saw his net worth top \$1 billion from stock holdings in the marketing software company he co-founded, HubSpot. In late July, Apple CEO Tim Cook, another introvert, announced record quarterly revenue of \$81.4 billion at the multinational

technology company. Earlier in the year, yet another introvert, Jeff Bezos, led his organization to record profits. In Bezos' last quarter as CEO, Amazon posted a first-quarter profit of \$8.11 billion — more than triple the net income from the same period in 2020.

Shah, Cook and Bezos are part of a wider trend involving introverts, who tend to get their energy from solitude while extroverts gain energy from other people. In recent years, introverted men have been finding growing success and appreciation for their tendency to listen carefully, stay calm, connect and think deeply about problems. Brash, combative men have seen their cache shrink amid a more volatile, decentralized, equity-oriented business climate.

A sign of the shift can be seen in the leadership of the world's most valuable companies. At least six of the 10 companies with the largest market capitalization are led by men who could be described as quiet or introverted. These include Cook at Apple, Mark Zuckerberg at Facebook and Warren Buffett at Berkshire Hathaway.

Extroverts will continue to have their seat at the table. But now is the time for quiet men to join them and take the lead.

For much of the past century, organizations have privileged the outspoken and gregarious to the exclusion of the quiet and introspective. This bias for extroversion over introversion shows up in many ways — like staff meetings and debates where verbal volume, confidence in a crowd and “thinking on one's feet” are lionized.

Many organizations haven't rewarded leadership so much as “loudership.”

And they've paid a price. By overlooking and undermining introverts in the workplace, companies have wasted untold potential. A growing body of research demonstrates the bottom-line benefits from a diverse workforce that feels comfortable bringing their full selves to work. Evidence also shows introverts have distinct advantages as leaders in particular.

Though introverts make up an estimated 40-60 percent of the workforce, according to Myers-Briggs and our own experience, they have often been

invisible. They have felt pressured by the extroverted mold to leave their valuable gifts — of engaged listening, of deep human connection, of extensive thoughtfulness and preparation — at the door.

Bias toward the extrovert ideal is part of a wider set of expectations for how to be a man in much of the world. This conventional or “confined masculinity,” as co-author Ed Frauenheim calls it in his new book “Reinventing Masculinity,” offers men severely limited roles and ways to relate to others. Men can be providers, protectors and conquerors, and they are expected to be competitive, aggressive and stoic.

Given these “man rules,” quieter men have shut down and become exhausted from playing someone they are not at work. Too often, they have been written off or even publicly shamed by type A leaders as slow or bereft of opinions when they actually have many ideas just under the surface.

Domineering, extroverted men have reigned in business for years, but they aren't well-suited to the world taking shape today. To navigate the complexity of an ever faster, flatter, global business climate, critical traits include a calm demeanor, curiosity, thoughtful reflection and the ability to build trusting relationships. Men — white men in particular — are being asked to listen more than they speak and to engage in profound self-reflection regarding long-standing privilege. These all tend to be the strengths of quiet men.

The pandemic has accelerated these trends favoring introverted men. Long seen as lacking toughness or moxie, many quieter men have adapted seamlessly to the difficulties of remote work. After all, solitude and independence are right up the introvert's alley. In addition, colleagues' physical and mental health challenges over the past 18 months have called for more sensitivity and compassion than ever.

Quiet men have been answering such calls. And finding rewards.

Consider Tony Bond, chief innovation officer at research and advisory firm Great Place to Work. Tony, a self-described introvert we interviewed, played a central role in facilitating internal employee listening sessions to make sense of the killing of George Floyd. Externally, he is now a sought-after speaker and consultant on topics including innovation, diversity and the future of work.

This is a far cry from the beginning of his career. Years ago, Tony was criticized for being “quiet” in a sales strategy meeting. He’d been trying to listen to other points of view. But competing for attention and seeking to dominate conversations were prized by his male peers at the time.

Tony, though, refused to change his identity as an introverted man more interested in solving problems together than standing out as the top dog: “I dug my heels in and said, ‘I don’t really care what the expectation is. I’m just going to be who I am.’”

These days, we aren’t criticizing quiet men like Tony Bond, Dharmesh Shah or Tim Cook. We are counting on them to calmly, wisely lead us into the future.

*Kahnweiler is the author of several books, including [The Introverted Leader and Creating Introvert-Friendly Workplaces](#). Frauenheim has co-authored several books, including [Reinventing Masculinity: The Liberating Power of Compassion and Connection](#).*

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