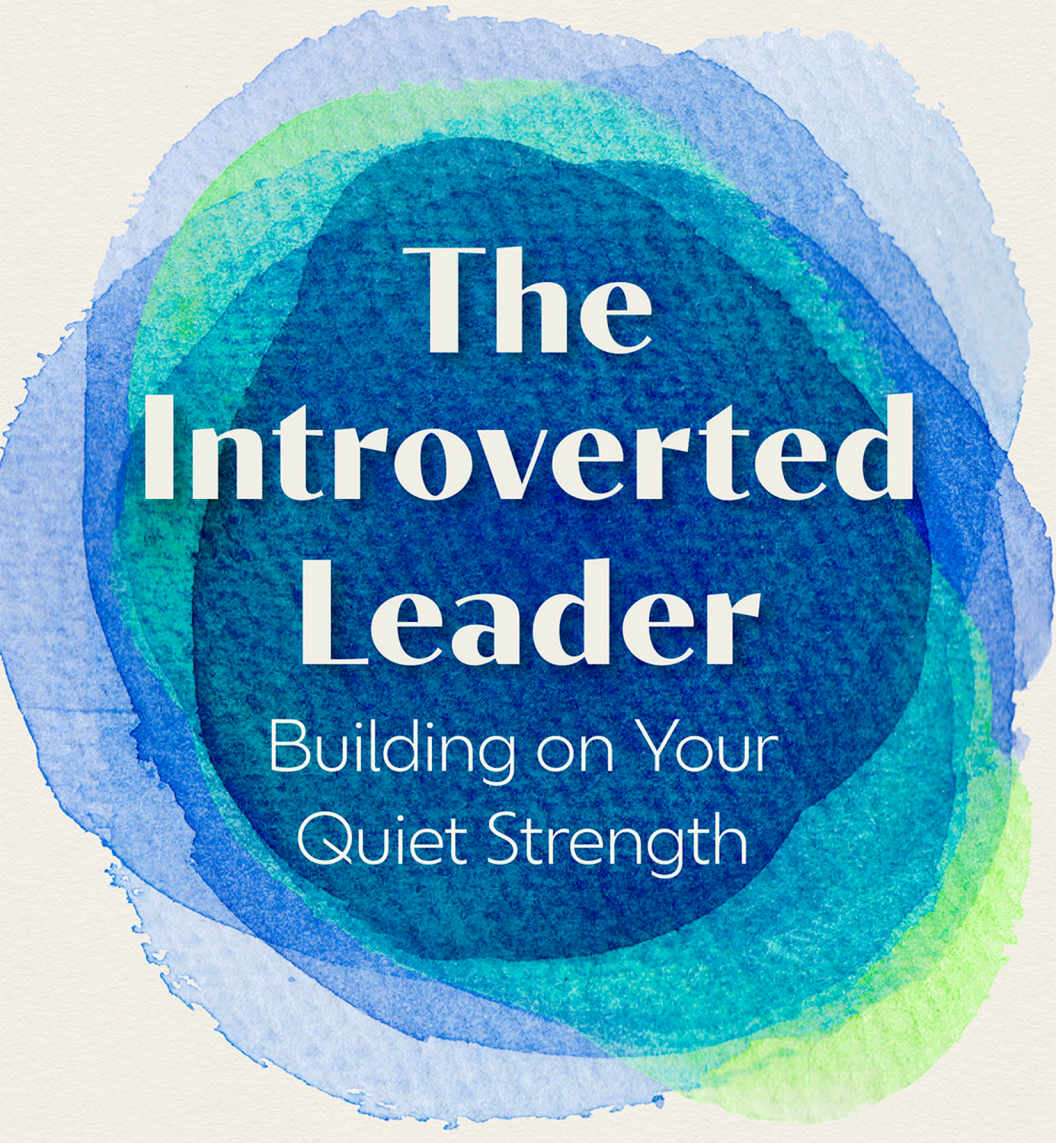


THIRD EDITION

Thoroughly Revised with New Strategies
for the Hybrid Workplace



The Introverted Leader

Building on Your
Quiet Strength

Jennifer B. Kahnweiler, PhD

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Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

The Introverted Leader, 3rd Edition

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PREFACE

*I'm perfectly happy being alone,
as long as there are books and thoughts.*

—Arianna Huffington¹

The Rise of the Introverts

Introverts rock. People often think that a big, vibrant personality is needed to succeed in the workplace. That simply is not true. Often it is the quietest people who have the loudest minds. Unfortunately, many introverts feel excluded, overlooked, or misunderstood, and our workplace cultures are still skewed toward extroverts. The hopeful news, however, is that introverts are finding their voice, and the world is starting to awaken to the power of introverted leaders.

When I wrote the first edition of *The Introverted Leader* fifteen years ago, it was before introversion was part of the global conversation. Back then, people thought the book title was an oxymoron. “How can you be a leader *and* an introvert?” they asked.

One reporter told me that she couldn’t get any senior leaders to admit on the record that they were introverts. The bias about quieter leaders was pronounced. I continually had to explain how introvert traits such as listening, preparation, and calmness are great qualities found in excellent leaders.

My consulting work with organizations had shown me the need for a book that laid out a framework for introverted leaders to succeed. Though I searched, I couldn't find any books on the topic, so I decided to write one!

I knew that introverts needed a practical guide to becoming successful leaders, but I didn't expect the passionate and appreciative reactions that I received from around the world after the book was published. *The Introverted Leader* has been translated into multiple languages, and I have traveled the planet from Singapore to Spain, from Vietnam to Paraguay. Readers were grateful that the leadership challenges introverts face were finally being addressed, and they appreciated the strategies the book provided. Focusing on introverted leaders was an idea whose time had come.

Today a strong case is being made for the importance of recognizing and valuing introverts' gifts and contributions. Many writers, among them Susan Cain and Sophia Dembling, have added their voices to the call for quiet strengths to be recognized and appreciated. Each year, new books, virtual "summits," and articles are written to support and elevate introverts at work. There are even "Introvert Weeks." More executive coaches are focusing on introverts in their practices.

We have also had a strong reception to our podcast, *Introvert Ally*, which aims to change culture by having conversations with successful introverted leaders and their allies.

We can call this phenomenon the "rise of the introverts." Introverts are embracing who they really are instead of trying to change themselves into some extroverted image of who they think they should be. As a longtime ally, I am so pleased about this evolution.

The Next Wave for Introverted Leaders

I see the next wave of the introvert revolution as going beyond equipping people with more skills to adapt to extrovert-dominant cultures. The revolution will be about transforming workplaces to become more inclusive. This is starting to take hold in organizations across the world, where diversity of style and temperament is becoming increasingly important to consider in addition to attention to race, ethnicity, and gender. For example, hiring managers are thinking about how to get the best from introverts in interviews. Employee Resource Groups to support and advocate for introverts are taking hold in many companies.

Senior leaders are reflecting on how workspaces can be organized to give introverts places to retreat and reflect. Meetings are being structured to include both writing and talking time. Companies realize that focusing on introverts makes good business sense.

New Research

Until now, little if any research on introverted leadership existed. Now a growing list of research studies and media coverage provides intriguing new data about introverted leaders. For the first time, serious academic research is being conducted on the qualities of introverts, the conditions introverts need to perform their best, the correlation between introverted leadership and company performance, and even the brains of introverts. This academic work shows no signs of slowing down. I include highlights from such research in this edition.

Over the past decade, I too have conducted research using surveys, interviews, and case study analysis. I have collected many new insights from my consulting work. Based on the questions from our community, I researched what makes introverts successful at work, including how they influence and work with extroverts to achieve strong results. After *The Introverted Leader*, I wrote *Quiet Influence*, *The Genius of Opposites*, and *Creating Introvert-Friendly Workplaces* based on that research. This third edition of *The Introverted Leader* builds on that work as well.

Who This Book Is For

Leaders at any level, including project managers and professionals who must influence others to get results, will find this book valuable. New niche audiences have emerged for the book as part of a burgeoning community, including senior executives, women in professions dominated by men, quiet men, salespeople, people of color, and extroverts who are interested in being more effective team members.

If you're a leader of people or projects, you likely have introverts on your team. This book will help you better understand them and maximize their contributions. If you read the last edition, welcome back. You will find a new chapter on leadership in the post-COVID hybrid workplace, and more strategies and information to support you on your leadership journey against that backdrop.

My Background

Frequently, introverted readers and event participants say, "You get me." I can think of no greater compliment. As an extroverted

consultant, speaker, trainer, facilitator, and leadership coach for more than forty years, I realize that I will never *truly* know what it is like to live inside an introvert's world. "I have been influenced by the introverts I set out to influence," I once wrote. That still holds true.

A good deal of my learning has emerged from being married to an introvert for fifty-one years. My spouse, Bill, has taught me to appreciate the values of quiet reflection, listening, and simply slowing down. Bill has led by example, which for me is the best way to learn. Though I am typically energized by people, I have become more comfortable hanging out with myself. I now carve out and welcome the opportunity for solitude and quiet time.

My Approach

I have interviewed and collected data from hundreds of introverted leaders across a wide range of industries. Some interviews were structured, with set questions. Others I conducted in preparation for speeches and training programs.

Wearing my journalist's hat, I filled notebooks with observations. I found that posing specific questions on sites like LinkedIn yielded provocative responses from introverts who prefer expressing their ideas and feelings in writing. This third edition also draws on the unique perspectives of leading academics and business thinkers.

Book Overview

We start off in the Introduction by highlighting the definition and benefits of introverted leadership.

Chapter 1 focuses on the six key challenges that most introverts face at work, including people exhaustion, dealing with a fast pace, getting interrupted, feeling pressure to self-promote, coping with an emphasis on teams, and handling negative impressions.

The framework of the book is introduced in Chapter 2, where you'll learn about the 4 Ps: Prepare, Presence, Push, and Practice. This is based on our research with successful introverted leaders. In reflecting on the steps they've taken to use their natural quiet strengths, these leaders continually described four steps for every leadership scenario they encounter. They prepare well, are present and stay in the moment, push themselves out of their comfort zones, and practice consistently. The 4 Ps also serve as an effective coaching tool.

In Chapters 3 through 9, you will learn how to apply the steps of the 4 Ps Process to confidently navigate typical workplace scenarios like leading people, especially in the new workplace; heading up projects; giving presentations; running and contributing to meetings; networking; communicating; coaching; and managing up. Each chapter includes a host of practical tools and approaches for you to immediately apply.

Chapter 10 addresses the many benefits you gain by focusing on your strengths.

Finally, the Study Guide at the end of the book helps you pull it all together by syncing up the 4 Ps with your next action steps so that you have a workable way forward. You will find helpful action plan templates and a brand-new Quiet Wrap-Up Journal to record your ideas and put them into practice.

You can read the chapters sequentially, or you can dive selectively into those chapters that pique your interest. My hope is

that you will find the lessons contained here helpful on your leadership journey and that you will share your learning with others. The more awareness of introverted leadership we create, the more cultures will become inclusive. I hope you find the process productive and satisfying. Thank you for your willingness to grow and contribute to changing our workplaces for the better.

CHAPTER 1

Six Key Challenges for Introverts

The Challenges

Imagine this scenario: For the fifth time at the staff meeting, the team leader asks what questions people have. A group of emerging leaders, mostly engineers, falls silent. Rather than engage people by requesting that they review materials prior to the meeting and write down their ideas and questions before speaking, the leader runs the meeting as she always has. She moves through the agenda quickly, expecting people to speak up voluntarily and share ideas aloud.

This delivery strategy is geared toward extroverts—and they aren't even in the room. The result? The leader moved forward with actions based on her own ideas, with little input, buy-in, and commitment from the group. Consequently, they felt overlooked and ignored.

This scene is all too common. While introverts increasingly recognize and own their strengths, it is hard to push through the deep-rooted, often subtle bias that caters to extroverts' preferences.

For much of the past century, organizations have privileged the outspoken and gregarious to the exclusion of the quiet and

introspective. Many organizations have not rewarded leadership as much as “loudership.” And they have paid a price. By overlooking and undermining introverts in the workplace, companies have wasted untold potential.

The traditional view of leaders is that they speak confidently and assertively, and they clamor to be the center of attention. They take control, shoot from the hip, and lay it on the line. We still live in a world where the extroverted “ideal” rules.¹

As you will see in this book, the research loudly and clearly refutes this assumption.

Naming the Challenges

In our studies, six key themes emerge as significant barriers for introverted leaders:

- People exhaustion
- A fast pace
- Getting interrupted
- Pressure to self-promote
- An overemphasis on teams
- Negative impressions

Naming these challenges is an important first step toward change, as many organizational leaders proceed with minimal consciousness, expecting people to conform to extroverted expectations. When we bring these challenges into the light of day, we can start to address them.

People Exhaustion

In a survey of one hundred introverts conducted by my company, more than 90 percent said they *suffered* from “people exhaustion.” I’ve seen a constant stream of data confirming this finding. It isn’t that introverts don’t like or can’t be with people. In fact, they enjoy people.

Rather, it’s a matter of degree. Their reserves of “outward” energy tend to get depleted more quickly in high-volume interactions. This is different from extroverts, who often report being depleted and fatigued when they don’t experience *enough* people time.

The “people time” threshold is different for everyone, but being outgoing, conversational, and highly engaged can be stressful for introverts. Part of a leader’s role is to connect with people, and without awareness and tools to manage their energy, introverts can become exhausted.

Fatigue, even a sense of dread, can set in before meetings and networking events. One introverted manager, tongue in cheek, said, “I would rather stay home with a bad book that I have already read than face one of those awful cocktail receptions.”

EXERCISE: THE FORCED SMILE

Try this exercise. Put a wide grin on your face and show your teeth. Hold it for at least five seconds. How does it feel to force that smile? It probably feels very uncomfortable. That kind of fake smiling is something that introverts feel forced to do multiple times a day. If you are an introvert, this probably feels very uncomfortable. If you are an extrovert, this should give you a glimpse into the introvert experience.

A Fast Pace

Despite the growth of technology—or maybe because of it—the frenetic pace of life at work and at home is a common complaint. And often, remote work and hybrid work have created no boundaries between these lives.

You might feel pressure from your manager, team, or organization to do fast turnarounds when you don't feel you have collected all the necessary data. Meetings are often scheduled back-to-back. As an introvert, you probably prefer to reflect on issues and ideas and to take more time to consider decisions, despite pressure to make them quickly.

Getting Interrupted

Many clients and readers of my books express frustration at being cut off, especially in meetings. “I don't ever get to finish my thoughts before an extrovert jumps in with theirs,” they say. Introverts often find they can't get their ideas into the mix until after the meeting, when it may be too late to be heard.²

This is especially commonplace for women in male-dominated meetings when the accepted norm is to interrupt. Women who are introverted may not jump into the discussion quickly because they think that is being impolite. They report that when they are not able to express their ideas in a public forum like a meeting, they are perceived as not having much to contribute. This can result in double bias—being passed over as an introvert *and* as a woman.

It is not only women who experience this bias. Men also are slammed with this criticism, as consultant Ed Frauenheim and I discovered in our research on quiet men. Not speaking quickly enough, or filling in pauses, rubs against the expectation that men should be “large and in charge.”³

As an introvert, you also are likely to appreciate the power of the pause, which provides you with a chance to catch your breath and think. However, when you pause, extroverts and fast talkers often think you have finished speaking, even when you are not done expressing yourself.

Introverts say that when they do speak up, their ideas often get passed over or hijacked by more aggressive people around them. Some also complain about their ideas not sticking. One seasoned IT leader said that “even poorly designed proposals floated in a public forum seem to have more staying power than those sent out in an email later.” In his organization, people are judged by verbal input, which he says has been a detriment to his career advancement.

Pressure to Self-Promote

Many introverted leaders say they don’t see the need to promote themselves or talk about their accomplishments. “The Undersell” was ranked as a top challenge in one of our surveys. When discussing how they refrain from self-promotion, one senior leader said, “An extrovert might easily sell themselves in a favorable light, but I keep waiting for that phone call.”

Discomfort with networking and a tendency toward humility can make self-promotion a challenge for many introverts. In addition, they value privacy, so blasting their accomplishments on social media feels uncomfortable. This can be a difficult issue when competing with their extroverted peers, who are highly visible on these channels.

One leader of several introverts told me something I hear often from other time-pressured leaders: “I don’t have the time to figure out who has achieved what. I give opportunities to those who tell me what they are doing without my having to ask.” And

often it is the extroverts who speak up to let everyone know what they are doing.

An Overemphasis on Teams

Think about the last work situation where you were productive. How much time was spent talking with others, and how much time was spent creating, writing, and producing work on your own? Probably mostly the latter, right?

When people collaborate to brainstorm ideas, think aloud, and feed off others' ideas, it can be invigorating and productive. However, many are starting to question whether we have gone too far in this direction, neglecting to consider the value of time for solitary thinking, reflection, and creation.

While teamwork can be helpful, it requires a lot of people interaction. It takes effort—more outward energy than inward energy.

Susan Cain, author of *Quiet*, coined the term *New Groupthink*, a phenomenon that has the potential to stifle productivity and “insists that creativity and intellectual achievement come from a very gregarious place.”⁴

So, while teams can bring diverse perspectives and skills to a project, structuring team processes to bring out the best ideas from introverts could be a much better way to accomplish goals. We address that idea in Chapter 6, *Leading and Participating in Meetings*.

Negative Impressions

Introverts often tend to show less emotion in their facial expressions than extroverts. Introverts are often asked, “What’s

wrong?” even when nothing is the matter. They’re usually just thinking. A concept called *the perception gap* offers one way to view how these impressions are formed.

The perception gap occurs when the feelings or attitudes you intend to project are misread by the receiver of your communication. For example, perhaps you want to show interest in a person who is talking. But because you don’t nod your head and react with animated facial expressions, your extroverted conversational partner thinks that you are bored. They leave the interaction assuming you lack interest in their topic even when that’s not the case.

In our surveys, we asked introverted leaders to report what labels have been used by others (mostly extroverts), who have misread their facial appearance and demeanor, to describe them. Their answers included “pushover, bored, slow, snobby, unmotivated, indecisive, unhappy, cold, and unfeeling.” In one stark example, a coaching client told me that because she was quiet and listening at a meeting, her team thought she was hatching a nefarious plot with their boss!

Another note on gender here: Women who are introverts report that men often judge them as being “cold and unfeeling.” Other women often consider them “stuck up.” This is another example of the perception gap, where intention doesn’t match what is read.

Next Steps

This book provides many practical ideas and suggestions for addressing these six challenges. You may decide to share your experience of these challenges with your manager and

coworkers to help them better understand what you experience as an introvert.

Or you could decide to do nothing at all. You have choices as to how you respond to your reality, and I want to provide you with as many options as possible to increase your effectiveness and help you stay true to the real you.

ABOUT JENNIFER



Jennifer B. Kahnweiler, PhD, is an author, global speaker, and podcast host hailed as a champion for introverts. Her bestselling books *The Introverted Leader* (three editions), *Quiet Influence*, *The Genius of Opposites*, and *Creating Introvert-Friendly Workplaces* have been translated into seventeen languages. She hosts the well-received podcast *Introvert Ally*. Her books and speeches have helped individuals, teams, and organizations harness and unleash introvert power.

Her career includes roles as an elementary school counselor, university administrator, government program director, corporate training leader, small business owner, and career coach. She has a diverse client list including the CDC, NASA, Synchrony, Bosch, and many others.

Jennifer has delivered invited keynote speeches in Australia, Vietnam, Singapore, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, and Paraguay. Her presentations include research, poignant stories, practical tools, and humor. She has also been featured in *Fortune*, *Forbes*, *Time*, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal* and has been a guest on over one hundred podcasts.

She received her PhD in counseling and organizational development from Florida State University, and her earlier degrees in sociology and counseling are from Washington University, St. Louis. She earned the Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) designation, which is held by a small percentage of professional speakers.

She is an active Advocate member of Onboard, an organization that aims to increase the number of women in executive leadership and corporate boards. She volunteers weekly at a food pantry and is grateful to incorporate family, yoga, pickleball, swimming, and travel into her life.

Jennifer lives in Atlanta with her introverted husband, Bill. She is inspired by her children and grandchildren: Lindsey and spouse Adam, Jessie and fiancé Rufus, and granddaughters Ava, Millie, and Solly.