

Susan Cain. *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*. New York: Crown Publishing, 2012, 323 pages.

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Every once in a while, a fresh, new voice has the audacity to challenge one of the underlying tenants of American business culture, and in doing so, help change the way that we think about things. Susan Cain is one such voice. In her recently published book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, lawyer-turned-writer-and-psychologist Cain takes direct aim at the “Extrovert Ideal” – the halo granted to those who mainly receive gratification by focusing on the world around them.

Cain’s meticulously researched book provides remarkable insights into how our American society values – or doesn’t – Introversion. Keep in mind that Introverts make up at least one-third and as much as one-half of the U.S. population, yet they often receive considerably less attention simply because they do not require interaction to the degree that Extroverts do. If you mistakenly believe that the most effective leaders are Extroverts, that using teams to brainstorm is the best way to foster innovation, or more simply, that Extroversion is a choice, you must read this book.

Drawing on the latest research in neuroscience and psychology as well as relevant case studies, Cain effectively debunks the Extrovert Ideal, and equally important, helps us to better understand and value many of the attributes and behaviors associated with Introversion. You might mistakenly believe that a book like this would be a dry read, but Cain is a gifted storyteller, interspersing engaging stories with scientific research throughout the book. This book is one of the most interesting works of non-fiction that I have read in quite some time.

Cain begins *Quiet* with a thoughtful story about how a shy, quiet woman possessing considerable courage changed the course of American history by refusing to move from her bus seat. That woman was Rosa Parks, and her story provides a perfect example of how Introverts can lead effectively. Cain’s introduction also provides useful background information about the nature of Extroversion versus Introversion, and how to determine where the reader falls on that continuum. She discusses some humorous findings about behavioral differences between more Extroverted versus more Introverted personalities. Did you know, for example, that Extroverts are more likely to commit adultery, commit crimes and place big bets? Introverts, on the other hand, are better at delaying gratification, thinking deeply and asking “what if” questions.

Cain follows her introduction with three chapters that address the “Extrovert Ideal”. In Chapter One, “The Rise of the Mighty Likeable Fellow: How Extroversion Became the Cultural Ideal”, Cain argues effectively that valuing people based on their personality is largely a 20th century creation, fed partly by Dale Carnegie and other self-help gurus. Before then, the “Culture of Character” pervaded, where persons were judged more by their virtuous private behaviors and less by how charming they appeared to be in public. The Culture of Character did not favor Extroversion over Introversion or vice-versa. She argues that the Culture of Personality, however, does, with the “hail-fellow-well-met” personality enjoying a special place of prominence in American society.

Cain does some of her own investigative work as part of her research for Quiet. She reports on three specific episodes in Chapter Two: “The Myth of Charismatic Leadership”. Note that while these episodes discuss her direct experience, she does support her impressions with other research.

The first of the three, “Salesmanship as a Virtue: Live with Tony Robbins” provides a first-hand account of Cain’s experience in attending one of multi-millionaire salesman’s Tony Robbins’ seminars, “Unleash the Power Within”. It turns out that unleashing the power means acting like an Extrovert, with the opportunity to pay even more money for more seminars to surround yourself with the right peers to act even more like an Extrovert.

The second, “The Myth of Charismatic Leadership: Harvard Business School and Beyond”, takes a hard look at the team-driven, case-focused learning environment made famous by Harvard Business School, and employed liberally at other business schools around the country. Team environments cater to Extroverts, but may be uncomfortable for Introverts who often need quiet time alone to ponder business problems and think creatively. Case-based learning typically involves assigning students a case or two to prepare for class, and then basing a large part of their grade on the verbal comments their share about the cases in class. The more Extroverted a person is, the easier it is for them to jump into the fray of case discussions. But is something lost in the process? What about the opportunity to think deeply and consider carefully the consequences of making wrong decisions? What about the kind exploratory experimental thinking that leads to great discoveries? Would an Introvert like Einstein have developed his theory of relativity through a case course, for example? Would Steve Wozniak have built his first computer through a case course? Case-based learning does have value, but it does not necessarily encourage innovation and creativity, or deep reflection.

The author takes her investigations to a church in her third section of chapter two, “Does God Love Introverts? An Evangelical’s Dilemma”. Cain addresses the commonly held evangelical view that every soul that one encounters is a person to be saved, someone to be converted to the teachings of Jesus. Mega-churches, with memberships in the thousands, and where connections to small groups form the essential connection to spiritual community with God, reinforce these ideals. Thus, in the evangelical’s world, the road to spiritual salvation runs head-on into community. The value of an Extrovert in such an environment seems clear. Yet Introverts, who may prefer a more personally reflective spiritual connection, and whose energies become drained by interacting with others, may have a hard time fitting into such an environment, or so Cain argues.

I appreciated the fact that Cain included a spiritual dimension to her exploration of Introversion/Extroversion. An interesting comparison chapter using another religious frame that focuses more on prayer, contemplation, and one-on-one confessionals (e.g. Roman Catholicism, for example) might have further amplified her remarks about “An Evangelical’s Dilemma.”

Cain’s third chapter, “When Collaboration Kills Creativity: The Rise of New Groupthink and the Power of Working Alone” focuses specifically on creativity and innovation. Research shows that creative people tend to be Introverts, who prefer to work independently and in solitude. Contrast that with the rise of team-based brain-storming methods often used to create solutions to business problems. Do you see a disconnect here? It is an obvious problem, but one that most who propagate the value of team work often miss. Cain carefully examines the problem and its consequences in Chapter 3, one of the most valuable chapters in the book.

In chapters four thru seven (Your Biology, Your Self?) the author focuses even more intensively on what science has to say about temperament. Cain addresses the questions of how much genetics influence our development of Introverted/Extroverted personality traits, and how our genetic temperaments interact with our environments in chapter four: “Is Temperament Destiny? Nature, Nurture, and the Orchid Hypothesis”. She continues this line of exploration, adding the element of free will –the ability to choose among different alternatives -- in chapter five: “The Role of Free Will (and the Secrets of Public Speaking for Introverts)”.

Cain’s sixth chapter, “Franklin Was a Politician, But Eleanor Spoke Out of Conscience”, frames a deeper examination of sensitivity to social and sensory stimulation – a common tendency among Introverts – using the relationship of Eleanor Roosevelt, herself a sensitive Introvert, and her husband Franklin, who was not. Anyone who has been told that you are being “too sensitive” will particularly appreciate this chapter, as it includes an excellent discussion about what research has to say about the positive attributes of such folks, including a strong moral conscience, and how they may complement other personalities.

The frame of financial decision-making adds accessibility to her scientific exploration of how Introverts and Extroverts make decisions in her seventh chapter, “Why Did Wall Street Crash and Warren Buffett Prosper? How Introverts and Extroverts Think (and Process Dopamine) Differently”. Fully appreciating this chapter requires some basic familiarity with how financial markets work. With that said, the author again makes very interesting a topic that could be dry by choosing a compelling frame for her conversation.

The third part of Quiet, “Do All Cultures Have An Extrovert Ideal” consists of a single chapter, “Soft Power: Asian-Americans and the Extrovert Ideal”. In this chapter, Cain contrasts American values with Asian values as they relate to Extroverted versus Introverted traits. These contrasts become more pronounced when considered from the perspectives of immigrants and their children, many of whom may feel caught between two worlds, fitting into neither completely. My only disappointment with this section is that it is only one chapter. The discussions in this section would be richer still if they included other ethnicities. Yet considering the growing influence of Asian-Americans in the U.S., it is reasonable that she chose to highlight them here.

The fourth section of Quiet (“How to Love, How to Work) includes three chapters of advice. Chapter nine clearly targets Introverts, as it concerns “When You Should Act More Extroverted Than You Really Are?”. The next chapter, ten, which addresses “The Communication Gap: How to Talk to Members of the Opposite Type”, seems relevant to both Introverts and Extroverts. The eleventh chapter, “On Cobblers and Generals: How to Cultivate Quiet Kids in a World That Can’t Hear Them”, gives parenting advice.

Cain’s thoughtful and well-researched book fills an important void in the psychology and management literature by providing a readable, careful and thorough examination of why Introverts are the way that they are, and why it is dangerous to overlook or downplay the talents that often accompany Introversion.

If you possess an Extroverted personality, reading this book will help you better understand the Introverts that populate your life, at work and beyond. If you are an Introvert and have always felt at a disadvantage in today’s team-driven, highly interactive business world, reading this book will give you a better sense of why you are the way you are according to neuroscience and psychology research. Reading this book may also help you navigate your work life more

effectively. You may feel like less of an oddity after reading Quiet, as Cain affirms many positive behaviors and attributes often associated with Introverts.

Regardless of whether you are Introvert or an Extrovert, pick up a copy of Quiet. It is well-researched, timely and a compelling read.