



LEADERSHIP

3 Ways to Help Introverts Shine in an Extrovert-Leaning Workplace

It's up to leaders to ensure outspoken corporate cultures don't silence their quietest and brightest team players.



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When you think of a successful CEO or leader, classic extrovert traits come to mind: outgoing, energetic, charming, talkative. Steve Jobs was famously extroverted, as was Margaret Thatcher.

In contrast, [anywhere between 16 and 50 percent](#) of the population are considered introverts -- people who find “alone time” energizing and might feel drained in social settings. And while there’s no right or wrong way to lead, introverts have to overcome a strong bias to reward extroversion. According to a 2006 survey, [65 percent of senior corporate executives viewed introversion as a barrier to leadership](#), and other studies have shown that highly extroverted U.S. presidents are perceived as more effective. Another study in *Financial Review* found that analysts issue more favorable forecasts for firms led by extraverted CEOs. The reality: Research shows that introverts are slightly more likely to surpass the expectations of their boards and investors.

Related: [How to Start a Business When You're an Introvert](#)

I’m a textbook extrovert, and I’m also the founder and CEO of my company, [Hint Water](#). But no matter your personality, there’s a good chance that you work with introverts. If you’re a CEO or manager, you likely have some reporting to you. I don’t want to surround myself with only people who operate the way I do, because [diverse minds make better decisions](#). It helps me avoid groupthink and blind spots.

This means that I had to consciously create a workplace that helps introverts feel supported and validated, so they can truly shine. From tweaking your office’s physical space to re-thinking how you run meetings, here’s how to make sure all your employees feel comfortable enough to bring their best to the table.

1. Build quiet spots in the office.

About [70 percent of workplaces use an open office plan](#), according to the International Management Facility Association. Sure, this saves money on real estate, but employees, especially introverts, hate it. A [study by Harvard researchers](#) found that open office layouts cut employees’s face-to-face conversations at these companies by 73 percent and increased email and instant message by 67 percent. Another study in *Frontiers in Psychology* showed that working in an open-plan office kills privacy and intensifies the perception of intrusion among employees. Employees without a sense of privacy had lower job satisfaction, work engagement and were more likely to call in sick.

from companies like [Zenbooth](#) or [Talkbox](#).

If you don't have the budget to rejigger your space, try installing bigger lunch tables in the kitchen or giving employees a coffee break at the same time to boost productivity and improve socializing at work. And no matter what, try to be understanding and flexible if an employee tells you that he or she needs to work from home for a day to maximize productivity.

2. Make company events inclusive for introverts.

Consider introverted personalities when you're planning company events, like happy hours and team-building. A lot of introverts get extremely anxious in a cocktail party setting. But on the flip side, getting to know their co-workers better can reduce their overall anxiety. So, what's the best way to strike a balance and make sure everyone has a good time?

I plan company outings to center around an activity, such as bowling, pottery making or wine tasting. (Keep in mind that some events, like trivia nights and escape rooms, may prioritize extroverts.) By providing structure to company events, I find that employees who find small talk and networking to be draining don't feel left out. When you do host happy hours or less structured gatherings, consider letting employees bring a plus-one, whether it's a spouse or a roommate or an industry colleague. This may make them more at ease and sociable in a setting that might otherwise not be their speed.

Related: [Why Introverts Are Good for Business](#)

3. Lead meetings mindfully to ensure everyone gets heard.

If you're managing introverts, one thing you might notice is that they're more hesitant to speak up in group settings, especially in brainstorming or large meetings. This can mean that they don't get the recognition they deserve or they feel shut out of conversations where they'd otherwise have valuable input.

In *Quiet Revolution*, the resource created by writer Susan Cain in conjunction with her book *Quiet: The Power Of Introverts In A World That Can't Stop Talking*, [one article explains](#), "The typical format of free-for-all discussions favors people who are more comfortable jumping in before thinking through their thoughts. Extroverts are naturally more comfortable jumping in quickly. Their way is not better or worse than ours -- it's just different."

But you can find innovative ways to lead meetings, brainstorming and all-hands to prioritize all

topic, gently encourage them to share their opinion.

Finally, think hard before you schedule a meeting. Ask yourself: Is this really necessary, or can it be handled over email or Slack? Introverts can be exhausted by back-to-back meetings. Keeping calendars clear of anything unnecessary can ensure you're not optimizing your work environment for extroverts only, and it gives everyone more time for productivity, no matter what their work style.

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