

# Networking for Introverts

Making connections for your business, career, and personal life even if you are a “loner”



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## Networking for Introverts

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What is an introvert?

First let's start with what an introvert is NOT. Being introverted does not mean you are anti-social, hate people or that you are a hermit. **Introverts are people who gain energy from having time alone.** An introvert thinks and problem solves in private. Introverts are capable of having friendships but prefer a few close friends to a list of acquaintances.

Introverts see the big picture, potential and the hidden motivations behind actions and words. You can use your introverted tendencies to create a deeper and more productive network.



Years ago, psychologist Carl Jung [[Carl Jung information and biography](#)] was one of the first people to put the discussion about the personalities of introverts and extroverts into the public arena. Introverts are people who are concerned with and interested in their own thoughts, ideas and internal world. They are more interested in these thoughts and ideas than they are in the stimulus and activity in the external world. Introverts may appear to be shy, and many people would be surprised to know that introverts often have careers in acting or the clergy, where they are in the public eye much of the time.

Katherine Briggs and Isabel Myers used the work of Carl Jung to develop the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. This instrument is one of the most well known and trusted personality assessment tools around. Because of its popularity there are now many online tools related to the MBTI [<http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/JTypes2.asp>]

Understanding your personality type can help you achieve more in your career and your personal life.

[<http://www.myersbriggs.org/type-use-for-everyday-life/type-in-personal-growth/>]

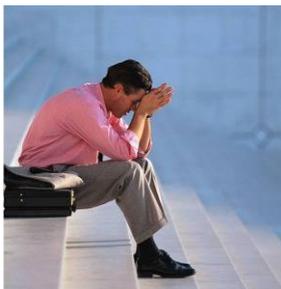
Though introverts have the reputation for being shy or even anti-social, many have good social skills and are adept at “reading people”. However, unlike extroverts who thrive on the energy of gatherings, introverts need time alone to recharge and rest

between social engagements. Introverted people often prefer to have one or two very close friends and not a mass of acquaintances.

Wanting to be alone is not always a sign of depression or anti-social tendencies. For introverts it could just mean a needed break to regain energy. Introverts find dealing with lots of people and social events to be draining. In contrast extroverts become energized and often leave parties feeling happy and excited.

Help for depression:

[http://www.helpguide.org/mental/depression\\_tips.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/depression_tips.htm)



#### Signs/symptoms of depression

- difficulty concentrating, remembering details, and making decisions
- fatigue and decreased energy
- feelings of guilt, worthlessness, and/or helplessness
- feelings of hopelessness and/or pessimism
- insomnia, early-morning wakefulness, or excessive sleeping
- irritability, restlessness
- loss of interest in activities or hobbies once pleasurable, including sex
- overeating or appetite loss
- persistent aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems that do not ease even with treatment
- persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" feelings
- thoughts of suicide, suicide attempts

The Good News—Introversion is associated with intelligence and giftedness.

After nineteen years of working with gifted children, The Gifted Development Center of Denver released a short paper documenting their observations. What they found was that 60% of gifted children were introverted compared to 30% of the general population. Moreover, 75% of those children identified as highly gifted were introverts. Unfortunately they also found that parents and schools tried to “correct” introversion and that the children sometimes adapted by hiding their abilities (girls) or ended up being labeled as immature (boys) for failing to socialize with peers with whom they shared no common interests.

### Famous Introverts

- **Laura Bush**, first lady
- **Bill Gates**, software pioneer
- **Candice Bergen**, actress
- **Clint Eastwood**, actor/director
- **Charles Schulz**, Peanuts cartoonist
- **Steve Martin**, comedian/actor/writer
- **Harrison Ford**, actor
- **Michele Pfeiffer**, actress
- **Thomas Edison**, inventor

## Why does this matter?

Western society, especially the business world, favors extroverts. Business is geared toward the extrovert's problem solving methods and ways of interacting with others. Below is a brief comparison of introvert and extrovert behaviors in business.

| Extroverts  | Introverts   |
|---|--|
| Solve problems by talking about them and potential solutions  | Like to listen carefully and rehearse potential solutions in their minds |
| “Snap decisions” – quickly declaring a strategy               | Planning, review, planning and then implementation                       |
| Bosses with an open door policy who don't mind drop in visits | “Appointment please”, a telephone call or email would be even better     |
| Speak up without fear in meetings                             | Reluctant to share ideas – especially before they are fully developed    |

The typical American (and increasingly Canadian and European) executive is a talker; they enjoy networking and public speaking. We've come to expect that leadership means the ability to comfortably swim through a sea of strangers, glad-handing each one on the way to the podium. People who are perceived as “likeable” get more job offers, clients and projects. Many people admit they would rather work with someone they like who

lacks essential skills than a person they see as unlikeable with great job skills. [Presentation on being liked in business: <http://www.slideshare.net/KarenSouthW/likeability-in-business>]

Harvard 2005 study on being liked in business:  
<http://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/4916.html>

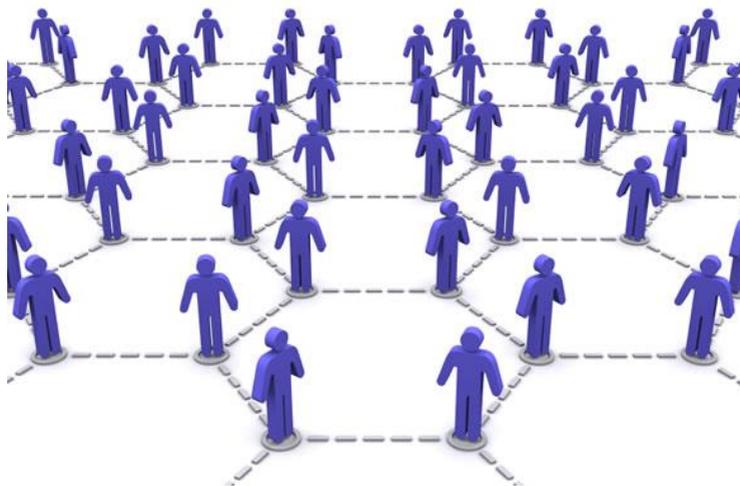
When you don't love networking events, feel drained at the end of social engagements, and shun unannounced interruptions to your work people may interpret your normal introverted behavior as a lack of business ability. This is just not so.

Introversion is not a disease. It is not by itself a sign of mental illness, nor do introverts "hate people", lack social skills or suffer from low self-esteem. Unfortunately there are some personality disorders and psychosocial problems with symptoms that look to the untrained eye like introversion. It is up to you to advocate for yourself and make your introversion work for you.

Focus on what you can offer. Introverts have a fantastic ability to concentrate, understand problems in great depth and work independently. The desire to think things through before sharing them leads to well developed proposals with great attention to detail and accuracy. Remember these

points when selling yourself in the business environment.

However, in business it's not always what you know but WHO you know, and this is where networking comes in. For extroverts, who enjoy meeting and greeting people, networking seems effortless. For introverts networking can seem like a chore. This is why you must put your natural abilities to work to help you excel in this area.



## Selecting Your Methods

Ok, you've decided you need to network, now what?

Put your introverted talents to work and develop a plan. There is no point in wasting your valuable time and energy on a haphazard networking plan that will wear you out mentally and physically and that has little chance of return. Let's examine the various networking options and how you can make them pay off for you—the introvert.

- A. 1 on 1 meeting: This is the best opportunity for an introvert. Your ability to listen attentively and understand a topic in depth will help you to have quality conversations with people. In a one-to-one conversation you can fully explore the relationships and potential opportunities available to you and your contact. The hitch here—getting the appointment can be tough. You will often have to go through one of the other networking channels to set up this ideal situation.
  
- B. Formal leads groups: Organized groups where professionals polish their “elevator speech” and provide each other with referrals can be good for introverts. Groups usually limit themselves to one professional per industry and so don't grow to a huge

size. The planned agenda provides introverts with ample time to prepare remarks and know when the event will end. The problem is these groups sometimes become stagnant. With no new members and no new ideas they can quickly become a waste of time. These groups often charge a weekly, monthly or yearly fee.

- C. Conferences and presentations: Professional conferences provide an opportunity to learn new information with breaks (opportunities to network) in between sessions. This format provides the introvert the opportunity to do some networking and meet colleagues with the built in excuse of the next session to keep interactions from being too long and draining. The short breaks are the perfect chance to introduce yourself and collect the business cards of others for follow-up later. The conference presentations allow introverts to then go back into the internal world of ideas. A big negative for these opportunities is cost. Conferences range in expense, but some cost thousands of dollars for just a couple of days. They often require travel as well. Unless you live in or near a large city, it's unlikely that many conferences will be held in your hometown.
- D. Open networking events/parties: Probably the least favorite form of networking for

introverts, parties can seem like a chore. These events are often built around an activity, sport or food. There's no schedule and no plan—not the best hope for an introvert. You can get the most out of these events by creating your own personal plan (see following sections). Try to limit the number of open events you attend to keep from feeling dread and drained.

Things to consider:

- Avoid events that you know will be built around an activity you do not enjoy. For example, if you have no love for team sports, don't join the chamber of commerce softball team.



- Try to attend events with a friend or colleague with whom you feel comfortable

- Make sure you have the right time and address—nothing starts your networking off worse than getting lost or being late
- Go early and offer to help the organizers—they will often take on the task of introducing you to people as they arrive

While you're on—at the event

Once you've made the commitment to attend a networking event you have to give it your all. It is essential that you demonstrate what society sees and accepts as “good social skills”. The ability to master these behaviors and use them even when you don't feel like it can be the key to making networking events work for you.

What is Charisma?

Like art, charisma is hard to describe but most of us feel we recognize it when we see it.

Those with charisma are able to charm, persuade, inspire and influence the behavior of others.

At one time we believed people were either born with or without the “gift” of charisma. Newer theories now tell us that charisma is a combination of attitudes and behaviors that can be learned and developed. It is this mixture of emotional intelligence, confidence and specific behaviors that creates charisma. By building up your emotional intelligence (EQ) and learning better communication techniques, you too can be charismatic.

Good social skills include the following:

Appearing relaxed—you must have the ability to control your anxiety and appear comfortable and relaxed, even when you are not.

Understanding conversation—there's an art to good communication. A real conversation involves give and take, and you should never feel like you are making a speech or giving a lecture. In addition you must be able to listen. This is an area where introverts really shine. Don't forget to give feedback to indicate that you are paying attention. This can be as simple as nodding, smiling or “uh huh” and “I see.” Paraphrase what you've heard if you need something clarified.

Make eye contact—but don't glare or stare. Eye contact is a sign of confidence and (in Western culture) indicates honesty. “Catching someone's eye” is a good way to open them up to being approached so you can talk with them. Reading body language is a large part of communication.

Most of our communication happens unconsciously through our body language. You can discover what messages you are sending by practicing in front of a mirror or having important presentations recorded for review.

Your ability to read and understand the signals people send non-verbally can help you to be a more effective communicator.



Some body language seems universal. For example, this woman is clearly annoyed and this man is obviously aggressively trying to make his point. However, remember things like eye contact and personal space can have cultural components as well. Don't hesitate to contact a communication coach for help decoding the signals.



## Unwinding and Recharging

You've done it, survived and maybe even enjoyed your networking event. Now what? Take the time to

relax and rebuild your energy level. Nothing rejuvenates an introvert after a big social event like some quality time—alone. Here are some favorite introvert activities:

- Read a book
- Take a long bath
- Play video games
- Listen to music
- Take a walk
- Watch television or a movie
- Go to sleep
- Write in a journal



It is essential that you do not over schedule yourself. Don't book draining social events "back to back", but instead build your recovery time into your schedule. Remember you don't have to accept every invitation. Sometimes being too available can backfire anyway by making it seem you have nothing to do. Use this perception to your advantage. When you decline an invitation don't feel obligated to give a long explanation.

## Nurturing your connections

It's not enough to just meet people and collect business cards. That's not networking. Powerful networking involves the building and nurturing of relationships. The follow-up to networking is where most people drop the ball, and it's the place where introverts can really shine.

A lot of time can pass between the day you meet someone until the perfect opportunity to collaborate or make a deal comes around. During this time you don't want to be forgotten. Email, phone calls and social media can help you to maintain contact with your network. Because many of these methods are not time sensitive and can be done from the privacy of your computer, they are perfect for introverts.

**Email:** It seems that email was tailor made for introverts. You can read/write it at any time. Email gives you the ability to think about, edit and perfect your thoughts on paper before sending them off. You can delve into the details of projects and ideas and take the time to digest the responses you get. Follow up all your initial networking contacts with an email.

**Blogging:** A web based log seems like a strange idea for an introvert; posting your thoughts for the whole world to see is not exactly "shy". But when you look below the surface a blog is another

communication method that is perfectly suited to introverts. You compose your thoughts in private and at your own pace. You only post things when you have finished mulling them over and editing, and you have control over the comments that are posted in reply on your blog. Encourage everyone in your network to read your blog. Use it to develop your personal brand and outline your views.

twitter



Twitter: Sometimes described as a “micro blog” Twitter quickly moved from a purely social and entertainment site to a modern business essential. People post 140 character “tweets” or statements about what they are doing or thinking at the moment. Savvy business users post links to interesting sites, new projects and promotional videos. Although your Twitter feed may read like a spontaneous and casual conversation, an introvert can plan out what they’d like to “tweet” about and take their time reading and responding to the comments of others.

The Facebook logo, consisting of the word "facebook" in white lowercase letters on a blue rectangular background.

Facebook: Using Facebook for networking can be a bit tricky. Because the site was originally designed as a purely social tool to help people connect with friends, it doesn't give you the degree of control that an introvert loves. Your "friends" can post things on your wall that you may not want your business associates to read. Consider creating a page instead of a profile. This way, people can read what you want to share, become "fans" of your company but cannot attach questionable content on your site.

Telephone calls: Probably not a favorite for introverts, phone calls should be used when they serve a purpose. Since introverts don't enjoy just engaging in idle chatting, don't try to call "just to say hi"; you will find yourself trapped in an uncomfortable silence as you struggle for something meaningful to say.



Deciding to keep at it—you have to do it more than one time

Many times as an introverted person you leave a networking event feeling pleased and relieved. You have survived the crush of a crowd of people, made a couple of really good contacts and now you are happily at home—alone—collecting your thoughts. Don't get too comfortable yet! Networking is not a *one shot deal*.

Like anything else we do for our well-being (exercise, study, bathing) networking requires an ongoing effort to really give us the results we desire. While it may not come naturally to introverts, networking can become easier with time. The key is to use the talents you have to build a system that works for you.

1. Research groups and people and spend your time meeting those that match your interest and needs.
2. Plan for events and make sure you have the right place and time. Arrive early when you can and take a “networking buddy”.
3. Use your introvert's attention to detail to become a better listener and conversationalist. This will increase your charisma.
4. Be sure to follow-up with your contacts and aim for those one-on-one meetings where you can really shine.
5. Build your recovery time into your networking schedule. Don't book too many stressful events “back-to-back”.

6. Follow-up with email and social media options. Build your online persona and get to know others in the virtual world before/after events.
7. Consider hiring a communication coach to help you develop your system, rehearse key presentations and build your confidence.

Remember, being an introvert can be a disadvantage in your business and personal life unless you understand how to capitalize on your strengths. Even though our society favors extroverts, there is nothing wrong with being introverted. It is not a sign of mental illness or anti-social tendencies and can be a secret weapon as you develop a reputation for being an attentive listener and careful problem solver.

Social skills, like networking, can be learned. If you want to work one-on-one with a communication coach or take workshops that help you to improve your skills please visit [www.karensouthallwatts.com](http://www.karensouthallwatts.com)