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Staying Genuine and Creating Connections: Networking and Involvement for Introverts

A Round Table Discussion Handout for the ACRL 2011 Conference

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Introversion: Often perceived as a negative attribute, it can be a solid foundation for building strong interpersonal connections and a reputation for compassionate competence.

Myths:

1. Introverts can be good workers but will never become high level managers or leaders in their field.
2. Introverts are anti-social and don't like other people, they should all work in a profession with minimal human contact.
3. Introverts don't like to talk to others.
4. Introverts are abnormal, most people are extroverts.
5. All introverts are shy awkward nerds.
6. Introverts need to become extroverts to live a meaningful life.
7. Introverts never relax and enjoy life.

Reality:

1. Introverts are leaders in all fields, some of them may be mistaken for extroverts by those who don't know them personally.
2. Introverts are often perceived as shy because they take more time to consider a situation before offering an opinion. In reality introverts are not shy but often prefer to offer carefully considered opinions.
3. Introverts usually do not like to engage in small talk not because they are anti-social but because they feel it has little value, and it makes them feel extremely uncomfortable.
4. Introverts do like detailed answers, when an introvert asks about something you are doing they really do want the details. Introverts generally will not ask a question if they don't want a full answer.
5. Introverts often like lists ;-)

6. Introverts need time to recharge after: being out in public, going to parties, attending big group meetings. This does not mean they don't like these things but they do find them more draining than their extroverted counterparts.
7. Introverts do like to have long sincere conversations with other people; this leads to less overall relationships, but a deeper connection to those they interact with.
8. Introverts are social. They may prefer dinner at a friend's house, or a lounge style bar, to a dance club.
9. Introverts relax mainly by doing solitary activities like walking, reading, soaking in a hot tub, etc. For an introvert these things can be very relaxing and fun, whereas an extrovert may relax more by attending a large party or going to a popular bar.

Strategies:

1. Stop Trying To Be The Perfect Extrovert

- **Introverts are not the same as extroverts.** Being an introvert is not wrong and it doesn't mean that you are missing out on life.
- **Trying to be something you are not will only make you miserable.**

2. Focus On Your Strengths

- Connecting with Individuals
- Collaborating
- Sympathizing with people who are struggling.

3. Treat Receptions & Conferences As Part of Work

- Seeing things as business instead of personal can take some of the pressure out of social gatherings. Ex. Teaching a class is more comfortable than attending a large party.

4. Getting Involved Professionally

- **Show up!!!**
- **If you don't do anything else show up and be present both mentally and physically.** People will remember that you cared enough to come, and being in the room while discussions are happening will help keep you informed. Attend interest group and round table meetings at conventions, and go to lectures and workshops at your institution about your areas of interest.
- **Focus your professional service on areas you are interested in.** These areas might be something new you want to try, or something they are really good at that you have a passion for. Focus your energy on changing problems that you care about, or building on things that you think are great.

- **Volunteer for service positions** you are comfortable with to check an organization out (Secretary, Meeting Time Coordinator, Web Master, Mailing List Administrator), and then volunteer for a position that will stretch you and challenge you to try new things.
- **You can quit a position if you're miserable.** If a position is making you miserable speak with your chair, convener, or whoever is in charge of your group and explain your situation and that you would like to withdraw from your position. While that is inconvenient for everyone it is better than having someone who is miserable in the position. If you are merely bored or not interested in the position any longer consider serving out the term before finding a new form of service. (It is normal to have to scale your activities back if you get over committed, especially if it is due to a sudden and unexpected increase in responsibilities at work.)

5. Network Your Way

- **Schedule time to yourself** between major events you find draining (when possible.) Take a long bath/shower and change at a leisurely pace, have a cup of tea, go sit by yourself in a garden, or take a 30 minute nap.
- **Mingle at events but don't try to meet everyone in the room,** you won't get to know anyone mixing that much and, the small talk will drive you crazy.
- **Make your goal to connect with people who share similar interests or who work in areas of interest to you.** Talking with people who genuinely interest you will help keep your energy up.
- **Introduce yourself.** This is probably the hardest thing to do, some ways you can do this are:
 - a. (Hold out your hand.) [Say your name] from [Insert Name of Your Institution], and you are?
Follow up: And what do you do?
 - b. Hi, I'm [say your name] from [Insert Name of Your Institution], I really like your dress/purse/speech, etc. <-Make sure you **really** like what you are complementing people about, never be insincere.
 - c. Find a friend who is outgoing and get them to introduce you to everyone. (I once met 30 people in one afternoon this way.)
- **If you find yourself slowly excluded from a conversation don't take it personally.** Some people only focus with others for a short period of time, other times it is just the nature of the conversation to move in a direction you are not familiar with or not interested in... If this happens you can slowly slip away into another group, or if you are not comfortable with that, take the opportunity for a bathroom break or to grab another beverage before finding someone new to speak with.
- **If you feel overwhelmed take a break.** Go to the bathroom, step on to the patio, but don't feel bad about taking a few minutes for you.

- **If you end up in a dead end conversation excuse yourself.**

OR

If you feel like you've monopolized someone's time and want to give others a chance to speak with them try saying:

- I'm sorry but I need to speak with ____ before they leave.
- I should let you mingle, but thank you so much for speaking with me/it's been a pleasure speaking to you.
- Thank you so much for your time, it's been great meeting you.

6. Ask For Help

- Understanding Others
- Dealing With Difficult People / Situations
- Phrasing Things Diplomatically

7. Take Advantage of Leadership Training

- Even if you don't want to be in charge you will learn valuable skills and be getting involved with your organization.

8. Read About Human Behavior & Psychology

- Find out why people act the way they do.

9. Read About Interpersonal Communication Strategies

- Find out how to express yourself so that people understand what you mean.

10. Study Conflict Resolution

- This can help you avoid conflict, or deflect negative energy. It can also help you be more sympathetic toward someone you feel is attacking you and take some of the emotion out of the exchange from your end.

11. Attend an Acting Workshop

- At heart acting is about communicating specific thoughts and emotions to others. An awareness of how body language and voice can be used to communicate effectively can improve not just our instructional sessions but how we relate to colleagues and users.

Suggested Readings:

Caring for Your Introvert

Jonathan Rauch, March 2003

URL: http://www.jonathanrauch.com/jrauch_articles/caring_for_your_introvert/

How to Interject in a Meeting

Jodi Glickman, Harvard Business Review Blogs, November 2010

URL: <http://blogs.hbr.org/glickman/2010/11/how-to-interject-in-a-meeting.html>

10 Tips for Giving an Important Speech

Alyssa Danigelis, INC. October 2010

URL: <http://www.inc.com/guides/2010/10/10-tips-for-giving-an-important-speech.html>

SLA's 23 Things

Special Library Association, May 2008 (Updated December 2010)

URL: <http://wiki.sla.org/display/23Things/23+Things>

Introverts at Work: Understand the Inner Life of Workplace Introverts

Peter Vogt, Monster

URL: <http://career-advice.monster.com/in-the-office/workplace-issues/understand-workplace-introverts/article.aspx>

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