



Are You an Introvert in an Extrovert-Oriented Workplace?

From Sherrie Haynie

Are you frustrated with a constant stream of interruptions to your work? Do you often feel **put on the spot** when asked for impromptu feedback during meetings? Do you feel drained after presentations, meetings, or other gatherings that require you to do a lot of talking? Do your co-workers talk over you during team brainstorms? Is your office way too loud?

If you answered yes to several of these questions, you may be experiencing the difficulties of an [introvert](#) working in an [extraversion](#)-oriented environment.

These difficulties are just now making their way into mainstream consciousness. Left unperceived, these personality differences may lead to stress, which may cause diminished performance or burnout in otherwise talented people.

While the challenges are substantial, having a preference for introversion should not prevent you from performing at your peak, even in a work environment that heavily favors extraversion. Your surroundings may or may not support your innate preferences – to perform successfully, you must learn to exhibit behaviors based on the **demands** of your environment. With a little self-knowledge and practice, you can – and should – tune into both your Introversion and extraversion preferences.

Are you an introvert in a workplace that values extroverted behavior? Because of your preference, you may find these four work situations challenging. Here's a tip about how to handle each situation.

Don't Let Your Environment Sap Your Energy

Introversion and extraversion, as assessed by the [Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®](#) instrument, describe whether you're energized through interaction with the outside world (extraversion), or from the internal world of thoughts and ideas (introversion). Individuals with a preference for introversion may appear just as lively and entertaining in social situations as their counterparts.

But, here's the rub: it comes at a price -- spending a significant amount of time performing extraversion-like behaviors requires a great deal of energy. Therefore, one of the first lessons is that a person who is an introvert, yet is required to perform extraversion-oriented functions or roles, may require time alone to re-charge.

- **Tip:** Identify activities that seem to sap your energy, and plan ahead for **decompression** time. For someone with a preference for introversion, you need to make sure that you include sufficient time in your schedule to work alone and that you limit your daily time in brainstorming meetings and noisy environments.

Avoid Feeling “Put on the Spot”

If your colleagues prefer extraverted behavior, they may feel perfectly comfortable responding to a question extemporaneously, without having a chance to fully weigh the implications of their response. They may not understand that **you** often need time to process your thoughts before responding to a question. You may not enjoy being pressed for details on the spot during meetings. Yet, if you're working in an extraversion-oriented environment, chances are this is the norm.

- **Tip:** Teach your colleagues how to best to communicate with you. If you need time to think before answering a question, explain this to them - and be sure to follow up with an answer, or they may think you're dodging them.
- **Tip:** You can counter this expectation by preparing ahead of time for meetings. The more you can anticipate and plan in advance, the more comfortable and less stressed you'll feel when someone asks you to comment during a meeting.

Managing Signals of Stress

Depleting too much energy by performing in a manner incongruent with your preferred behavior will lead to a stressful reaction. Early warning signs of stress include noticing that an employee has reverted to an exaggerated form of his or her innately preferred behavior. For those employees who prefer introversion, who naturally tend to turn inward, stress signs may materialize in the form of withdrawal.

However, if a stressful situation is left unresolved, unconscious functions will take over, and the employee may begin exhibiting the opposite of his or her normal behavioral preference. This may sound harmless, but because you may not be as comfortable operating on this side of your personality, a stress reaction may result. It will often take the form of an **immature** expression of the opposite of what you're like under normal circumstances. Therefore, if you typically have a calm, reserved disposition, under extreme stress you may exhibit uncharacteristic outbursts or other outward expressions.

- **Tip:** Take time alone to reflect and direct your focus on thoughts, ideas and internal feelings. You'll want to schedule regular breaks throughout the day, too. In these ways, you'll keep your batteries charged, and keep your stress levels under control,

Understand How Stress Affects Your Coworkers

As an introversion-oriented worker in an extraversion-prevalent environment, you'll also benefit from understanding how stress may affect your colleagues. For coworkers that prefer extraversion, uncharacteristically critical or harsh behavior may be an **early indication** of stress – once again, an **exaggeration** of innate preferences. On the other hand, if allowed to escalate, your stressed-out coworkers may actually become withdrawn. In other words, their signs of more severe stress may mirror your early warning signs, and vice versa.

- **Tip:** Watch for early warning signs of stress among coworkers. Extreme stress can result in the opposite personality preference erupting. This makes it particularly important to recognize early

warning signs, because if the stress escalates, you may not recognize signs of more severe stress in your extraversion-oriented colleagues, as they may be internalized.

Your personality includes both innate and learned behaviors. When an individual describes his Myers-Briggs personality type, he is referring to the innate preferences he has held from birth. The results do not include the experiences, culture, interpersonal interactions and educational pursuits that mold your **full personality** over a lifetime.

By understanding that one set of behaviors is **innate** and the other **learned**, you are empowered to flex your full behavioral range. Thus, if you have a preference for introverted behavior, you can still give a top notch performance within an extravert-prevalent environment.