

Quietly confident: How introverts can build leadership skills in a loud business world

As an introvert, you've probably been given feedback for how to enhance your skills and advance your career, such as "speak early in a meeting to make it clear that you contribute", or been told to network to get to know the right people to benefit your career longer term

Temps de lecture : minute

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This is usually well-intentioned, but doesn't take into account that most introverts don't want to talk unless they have something unique to add - we don't do «talking for the sake of talking» and prefer to know what we're going to say before we say it - and we generally dislike networking in the traditional sense, where you quickly bounce your way across a group of people to get to know as many as possible. It's easy to think this can hinder an introvert from progressing in their career: The fact remains that, in most organisations, being highly visible and showcasing your work and value remain key to getting the best assignments, being considered for promotions, and being challenged in a way that improves your skills over time.

However, what we usually don't consider is which skills are needed to be a good leader in the first place. When building your leadership skills, it's important to understand what kind of leader you want to be and compare this to the skills you already have, to understand where your strengths are. It's easy to copy others, but we should all go through a journey of discovering the unique qualities we possess and how this has the

potential to translate into something we can use as part of our leadership portfolio.

Do you want to be a Barack Obama or a Donald Trump? A Satya Natella or an Elon Musk? What a good leader looks like depends on the environment you're in, and the challenges your organisation faces - but that doesn't mean you should change who you are or fundamentally change your style as a leader. Research shows us that the best leaders are those we feel to be authentically themselves, which allows others to also be themselves. It's therefore never a good idea for an introvert to pretend to be something they're not. In addition to coming across as not being genuine, which will be held against you, it's also exhausting and only sustainable at great personal cost. Instead, let's identify the strong leadership skills that introverts are more able to naturally access and can build on.

Handily, they are exactly the types of skills that most organisations need today, such as: Calmness in the face of adversity; an ability to deeply listen and observe to understand the underlying meaning of what's being said and not said, which also helps to give a greater sense of empathy with others; the confidence to step back and reflect instead of making knee-jerk decisions in complex situations; and the humility and self-awareness to know that they don't always have the answer and are therefore more likely to seek out advice from others. This means that introverts get better results in organisations where team members are highly skilled and proactive, because they allow individuals to shine and are humble enough to listen to what their teams are saying.

As a leader who wants to become better, let's challenge some of the preconceived notions about what a good leader looks like. Take talking as an example: Extroverts tend to talk as a way to process their thoughts, whereas an introvert will think before speaking. This means there's more room for introverts to listen and observe, which allows for much greater insight into the views and positions of those around them- and enables

them to adjust what they're saying to those arguments, making them more persuasive when they do speak. Similarly, an introvert who reflects on a decision doesn't necessarily lack decisiveness, but instead makes considered and defensible decisions instead of rash ones. And holding that pause takes confidence. The quiet confidence that an introvert has as a leader is a different kind of confidence to the energy an extrovert brings to the table. Extroverts tend to make statements they're certain about, even if they're not actually correct, whereas an introvert will reflect more on the statement before making it, which allows time to consider complexity to a greater extent. That doesn't mean the introvert has less confidence, it just shows up differently. Someone's confidence as a leader isn't diminished by asking for input from their team; it's elevating the team and showing that the quiet leader has trust in their contributions.

The language we use matters, so when we reframe how we think about the introvert's skillset in this way, it's easier to see an introvert's leadership potential.

In summary, as an introvert reflecting on how to build your leadership skills, focus on three things: First, identify the skills you want to have and what kind of leader you want to be. Then, identify your strengths from that set of skills, and know that introverts already have a large majority of the skills that a modern leader needs – perhaps not the «in your face» loudness of years gone by, but the type of skills an organisation needs to bring out the best in others, which in turn drives higher performance. And finally, own those skills and let them shine – they're not «less than» the skills an extrovert brings, just different.

Sissel Heiberg is author of *Quiet Leader: What you can learn from the power of introverts.*

'An invaluable read for introverts and extroverts alike.'

Elizabeth Honer CB, former CEO

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