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The Genius of Opposites

How Introverts and Extroverts Achieve Extraordinary Results Together

Jennifer B. Kahnweiler • Berrett-Koehler © 2015 • 168 pages

Take-Aways

- If introverts and extroverts work well together, they can achieve excellent outcomes.
- Yet “opposites” can disagree swiftly and remain at odds for extended periods of time.
- Try to understand the “personality style” of your opposite colleagues.
- Both introverts and extroverts must understand how people of the other persuasion think.
- Introverts and extroverts speak “different languages.”
- Successful teams of introverts and extroverts usually decide to buy into each other’s differences.
- Debating differences and dealing with them is essential to finding better solutions.
- Your partnership could suffer if either of you think you’re more important than the other.
- Don’t let your partner’s method of conveying information interfere with achieving your mutual goals.
- Draw on the natural strengths of your and your partner’s personality types.

Recommendation

Best-selling author of *The Introverted Leader*, Jennifer B. Kahnweiler discusses the differences between introverts and extroverts, and then delves into their potential harmonies. These two types of people function differently and in often predictable ways. If they understand each other and work together, they can produce spectacular results. Successful teams of “opposites” buy into each other’s differences but their partnerships can suffer if either comes to see him- or herself as more important. Kahnweiler’s cogent guide on how opposites can work and thrive together is a gentle, entertaining discussion about broadening your repertoire of professional skills. *getAbstract* recommends her insights to HR professionals and to anyone who collaborates with or manages other people.

Summary

Achieving Spectacular Results

When introverts and extroverts work together successfully, they can achieve great outcomes. Examples of stellar introvert-extrovert pairs include John Lennon and Paul McCartney, Sheryl Sandberg and Mark Zuckerberg, Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, Ralph David Abernathy and Martin Luther King Jr., and Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt.

“Genius opposites are partnerships made up of introverts and extroverts in all types of combinations. These include executives and admins, creatives and their collaborators, sales people and office support personnel, project managers and their sponsors, and more.”

However, this rosy picture has a more somber side. “Opposites” can quarrel swiftly and remain at odds for extended periods of time. They can hurt each other as much as they can benefit each another. If opposites have to work together, they must pay attention to and nurture their relationship – as couples must to have a good marriage. Their chances of success increase if they stop concentrating on their differences and focus instead on the fruits of their mutual labor.

Planning Your Career

In the past, career growth required thinking only about yourself. In today’s world of work teams, you must learn to work with others to help them achieve their aims in order to reach your own goals as well. To do so, you have to understand your colleagues’ “personality style.”

“Introvert and extrovert opposites, working together, can accomplish great things.”

Introverts pull their energy from within themselves, while extroverts draw juice from the outside world. For the most part, personalities fall on a continuum, with deep introversion and extreme extroversion at the two far ends of the scale. Other people might classify you as an introvert if you need time alone to “recharge” after a large party.

“Successful opposites use their differences to challenge each other’s conventional thinking and blast apart their assumptions.”

On the other hand, if you have to debate with yourself about whether you need time alone at all, you’re likely an extrovert. However, even an extrovert who enjoys large parties could still feel reticent and uncomfortable with a group of people he or she doesn’t know well, even if they’re all from within the same organization.

“See disagreement as necessary to arriving at better outcomes because you challenge each other to come up with better solutions together than you would alone.”

In the workplace, both introverts and extroverts should consider how people of the other temperament think. Introverts like to keep to themselves, and that includes not sharing what they think. Extroverts share everything and want to make everyone they meet into a best friend. If you don’t reflect on your counterparts’ psychological bent, their actions could confound you.

“Different Languages”

Introverts and extroverts must learn that they speak what amounts to different languages. The more quickly they appreciate that, the sooner they learn to communicate and collaborate. Introverts need to spend time alone. They need time to reflect on issues before speaking or acting on them, and they tend to keep “personal matters” private. Extroverts love spending time with other people and can’t understand why introverts want solitude. Extroverts can get impatient waiting for introverts make up their minds. Extroverts’ love of speaking to everyone about even the most personal matters baffles introverts.

“Accept the Alien”

You can’t change a teammate’s or partner’s personality, but you can defuse tension by accepting that he or she functions on a different psychological plane. Successful teams of introverts and extroverts usually decide to buy into one another’s differences. They don’t let the methods by which they convey information to each other get into the way of achieving their goals. This deepens their insight into each other and makes the team stronger.

Tense Times

Confronting stress often accentuates certain aspects of individual personalities. Amid tension, introverts withdraw into themselves, while extroverts may throw themselves into the outside world. Study your own psychological style and that of your partner. Identify the issues that trigger problems. Remember, your partner doesn’t intentionally mean to aggravate you; he or she may simply have a different orientation.

“These relationships are most successful when opposites stop focusing on their differences and use approaches that move them toward results.”

Speaking openly about the differences in your personal and psychological styles can deflate much of the tension. In any given situation, consider the possible emotions and reactions of someone who has

the opposite approach to yours. This thoughtfulness can deepen your understanding of your partner or colleague and can help you devise more effective communication techniques.

“There is nothing like the outside stress of a move or close living quarters to bring out our irritations and lower our tolerance levels.”

Develop signals that help your counterpart understand what you intend to communicate. For example, you could signal your introverted partner that he or she doesn't have to take something you're about to say – something gregarious and extroverted, perhaps – as a crucial to your mutual project. This provides reassurance that you'll focus back on the subject at hand sometime soon.

“Introverts and extroverts who work well together are fortunate. They can pull out the best thinking from each other, like blending two brains into one.”

Regularly clarify your thought process with your partner. This is harder for an introvert than for an extrovert, but consistent open discussions can help you both make sure that you remain on the same wavelength no matter the differences in your styles of work, communication or socializing. Remember, you can't change other people, “but you can understand them. Once you are able to accept this fact, you are in for much less stress.”

“Bring on the Battles”

Debate and differences are essential to the process of finding better solutions. If you work well with your partner, you will challenge each other to do your best. Accept that you may take some time to come to an agreement and that the process can make you both more “productive.” Your partnership could suffer if either of you comes to see yourself as more important than the other. Don't bury your head in the sand. Always take the time and energy to work through your differences so you both feel satisfied. Never lose sight of your common goals.

“Remember Energy Differences”

As an extrovert, be aware that your introverted collaborator may need time to consider all the facets of a question before answering it. As an introvert, understand that your extroverted colleague may want to act right away. Make sure your teammate knows what you want. When issues arise, you and your colleague must decide together how to proceed. If one of you is more equipped to address the problem at hand, let that partner lead.

“Know that each one of you is incapable of offering everything, so for true diversity, you work in concert to provide the widest range of options to others.”

If you hit an impasse with your partner or colleague, bring in a third party as a mediator. Or, just take a break. Since introverts and extroverts think so differently, you and your opposite can exasperate each other easily. Get outdoors and go for a walk together. That kind of activity gives extroverts time to talk about their thoughts and gives introverts a peaceful respite to clarify their thinking. As you walk together, you can come up with new ideas or solutions.

Build on Your Strengths

If you and your partner draw on the natural strengths of your personality types, you can achieve extraordinary results. For example, as an extrovert, you might enjoy meeting new people more than your introverted partner does. But if you are in business together, one of you probably has to be an outgoing rainmaker. You and your partner must remain aware of the big picture – or you could lose opportunities and money.

“The truth is that these opposite pairs require constant vigilance, careful maintenance and balance.”

Always make sure each partner gets part of the credit for any success, so neither one becomes resentful. Don't expect your partner to conform to your perceptions of how his or her personality type should act. Understand that human beings will act inconsistently, including your teammate.

Explore your inner self before trying to establish a relationship. That introspection can give you the knowledge, insight and self-awareness to decide what part you want to play on a team and what you can contribute. Act as a booster and advocate for your colleague. Many introverts downplay their achievements, and an extroverted counterpart can help correct any oversight.

“Know each person's role in a scenario and cast them so that you bring out your opposite's best. Opposites share the credit, no matter what role they take.”

Adam Grant, author of *Give and Take*, researched traits that make salespeople successful. He found that those who tapped into both introvert and extrovert characteristics had a greater chance of achieving the results they wanted. He suggests that companies can benefit from training extroverted workers to develop and draw from “the quiet, reserved tendencies of their more introverted peers.”

“Destroy the Dislike”

Spending time with those who are temperamentally different from you can be challenging. Opposites will argue and fight. Even in the midst of disagreements, no matter how heated, keep a clear view of what you want to achieve together. “When the inevitable crises occur, put your heads together and figure out a way through.” Then, if you honor other people's nature and accept them as your friends, the quality of your conversations will improve. This increases the probability of creating something extraordinary together.

“The deal-breaker question of whether you are more of an introvert or extrovert is this: Do you need time to recharge after being with people?”

As opposites, Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak had different temperaments and could have disliked each other. And, in fact, they didn't form an immediate friendship, but they both cared about electronics and loved music. That was enough to create a foundation for working together to create the Apple computer and launch “an actual technological revolution.”

Some Words to the Wise

As an extrovert, give your introverted colleagues time to decide when and what they want to disclose. Introverts should use the same approach to decide whether they can put their faith in someone else, particularly an extrovert. As an introvert, share what you can with an extroverted friend and stop talking if you feel uncomfortable.

“When you respect each other and act like friends, you can talk openly and have fun.”

Remember to keep laughing. Look for the funny side of your interactions so you can both unwind, stay friends and help each other when the going gets tough. Comedian and pianist Victor Borge explained it best: “Laughter is the shortest distance between two people.”

No one can come up with methods or resources to deal with every challenge, but the combined strengths of introversion and extroversion create an “unstoppable” combination for your projects or clients. Work together to develop multiple options.

How You Could Fail

If you let one psychological style dominate your life, you might sabotage yourself. For example, introverts can spend too much ruminating when a situation calls for action. Extroverts may want to move so quickly they can make mistakes. Secure the necessary cooperation and agreement from your partner. Before meeting with a client, prepare as a team. Be sure your partner is ready for a meeting or presentation. Otherwise, the extrovert could swamp the customer with too much detail, or the introvert could sit seething on the sidelines.

Use Your Understanding

Check back with your customers about what worked when you helped them and how you can improve the quality of your service. If either you or your partner spots something that went wrong, discuss it. Make lists that bring out the nuances of the issues you’re facing together and the concerns those issues raise.

“The death knell to real collaboration is politeness.” (biologist Francis Crick)

If you recognize your clients’ introverted or extroverted orientation, you can serve them better. Your new insights of how different personality styles function can help you increase your business or heighten your success within your company. Give inward-looking clients time to process an offer; suggest that they consider your proposal and get back to you. Build stronger bonds with extroverted customers by asking about their personal interests. Engage them in conversation. Talk to them about the possible choices you offer.

When you work in tandem with your introverted or extroverted partner, you can offer your customers balanced insights from both perspectives and provide better service as a team.

About the Author

Faculty member of the American Management Association, **Jennifer B. Kahnweiler**, PhD, also wrote the bestsellers *Quiet Influence* and *The Introverted Leader*.



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