Ways Introverts and Extraverts Can Accept, Respect, and Embrace Human Differences

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Think about the last invitation you received to a large party where you would know almost no one. You would spend the evening meeting new people and getting to know them. Were you excited about the idea of attending such a party? Would you think about the fun and excitement of meeting new people, or would you feel better knowing you could spend the evening in conversation with a few people you know. Or would you rather spend a quiet evening with two or three good friends, people you already know? Do you usually come home from such a party with strangers excited about the new people you met and energized by the event, or would you more likely be exhausted, not wanting to attend another such party for a long time?

People have different ways of interacting with those around them, with both social interactions and processing information. These two contrasting approaches regarding our interactions with others represent only one aspect of what is known as personality type. Carl Jung, a prominent 20th century psychologist, spent years looking at differences in preferred processes and approaches to living our lives and defining the basic components of personality type. The basic ideas resulting from his observations and study are summarized in the box below.

It is the nature of humankind to live in a complex lacework of social and interpersonal relationships. Habits of mind act in combination with other innate dispositions to influence how we perceive and judge these relationships. Perceptions and judgments, in turn, promote typical, discernible expressions in behavior that tend to be consistent and enduring. The structure that explains these habits and typical behaviors is psychological type.

Early in the 20th century, Kathryn Briggs and her daughter, Isabel Myers, developed questions and a scale to differentiate and assist in the identification of these types. Based on Jung’s research findings, their work was an attempt to help people understand the inherent and observable differences in human behavior that originate with differences in personality type. Their
mission was to help people see differences as natural rather than deliberate attempts spawned in the dark of night to irritate you to distraction and stymie all your wonderful ideas and good work! When we observe differences in other’s behaviors, there often is triggered within us a natural and common response. That is, we may see these differences as but temporary manifestations of madness, badness, ignorance, or illness. We naturally account for observed differences in behavior in terms of flaws and afflictions in other people. “Oh, why couldn’t they be more like me?” Or more pointedly, “They should be more like me or see things the way I do!” Our attempts to reconstruct others can result in change, but when it is done by taking away their preferred processes and approaches, we often create a scar rather than a genuine transformation.

You can pull the fangs from a lion; but you have not created a domestic cat, only a toothless lion.

The attempt here is to help people see the contributions of two contrasting preferred approaches as described in the Myers/Briggs Types, the “Introvert” (I) and the “Extravert” (E). In addition, suggestions will be given to help people resolve difficulties they experience with the opposite type.

Introverts
People whose preference is introversion feel most comfortable processing information internally before sharing or interacting with others. In this way, introverts tend to take time before responding to new information and new situations, often not wanting to verbally express their thoughts before there is clarity, organization, and rationale. They usually have difficulty providing immediate responses, except with issues where they have previously had time to think about it. Then what appears to be a “spontaneous” responses is usually the result of prior internal processing of their ideas and reactions. They tend to internally process first before they are ready to respond. They, however, can get so involved with processing that they forget to check in with the outside world and fail to express themselves and their ideas. Or at times they have thought internally so much it feels like they must have told others when in fact they have not shared it with anyone.

Introverts are energized by things that originate in their own inner world, like memories, ideas, images, reflections, and reactions. In some ways, they are captivated more by an idea of something than the thing itself. They also tend to enjoy and are energized by solitary activities or involvement with a small trusted, inner circle, and often feel like a “deer in headlights” and overwhelmed when in a large gathering of strangers. Such events tend to “drain” the introvert while solitary time often recharges them. But their quiet trait can have a calming effect on others. Introverts enjoy interacting with people they know but also need solitude. The following are other typical characteristics of introverts.

Introverts:
* be seen as calm, centered, reserved.
* feel comfortable being alone and need solitude.
* prefer fewer, more intense relationships.
* sometimes spend so much time in reflection they never move to an action phase.
* appear disinterested or ineffective in group decision-making activities.
* be viewed as people having great “depth.”

Extraverts
Extraverts are energized by interaction and processing information externally. They want to share what they are thinking “right now,” which is their way of initial processing. Their
thoughts are given clarity, organization, and rationale through this externalized, verbal give-and-take. This verbal interaction is key in their thinking process. Hearing thoughts expressed out loud is the foundation of their processing pattern, and they lose their ideas if not shared relatively soon. Other distractions can quickly displace the original thought unless it is expressed verbally. They are oriented to interaction with people and action first. Their understanding develops through discussion and feedback with others much more than internal processing. In fact, when they are alone, they still may process out loud in order to “hear themselves think.”

Extraverts are energized by those around them, seeking variety to avoid boredom and may be impatient with long, slow projects. They often energize others, feeding off each other and their interactions. In fact, they often provide the thoughts that introverts consider when improving their own ideas. They appear to be very friendly and easily interact with strangers, stimulated by new information and people. They often know a large number of people and are great for finding new services because of the large circle of acquaintances they keep. They are people who are most comfortable and at home in the outer, external world. Extraverts enjoy solitude, but they need interaction with others. The following are other characteristics of Extraverts.

**Extraverts:**
* are usually seen as “go-getters.”
* are experienced as “people persons.”
* feel comfortable and enjoy working in groups.
* become disoriented and insecure in the absence of verbal interaction and feedback.

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**Time Differences**

The time required for a response is a significant difference between extraverts and introverts. While introverts need time to collect and make sense of their thoughts, extraverts say things that are not their final thoughts, although it may sound that way to others. They simply are expressing out loud what they are thinking at the time, which may change as a result of additional five and take. Extraverts are not likely to sit back quietly and wait, while introverts watch, reflect, and wait before acting. Extraverts often jump into conversations because of their excitement and love for interactions, and need to verbalize their thoughts before losing them, while introverts tend to wait for an opening, preferring to be invited to talk, and may shut down if interrupted.

**Working Out Differences**

There are many things introverts and the extraverts can do to help and support each other in relationships. One of the most important, however, is to begin to see the opposite trait as a preference and the most comfortable approach to life for that person. It is not just a deliberate choice, but more a mental habit that develops early. As such, it is a normal, natural difference and not a deliberate attempt to be difficult. In other words, it is important not to judge the opposite preference, but rather to see it as what a person needs to feel most comfortable in relation to others. It is not a plot against

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* frequently have a wide range of acquaintances and friends.
* sometimes jump too quickly to new things without adequate reflection.
* sometimes forget to slow down and clarify the ideas that give meaning to their activities.
you, but the way he or she is most comfortable processing information and being with people, including you. With this in mind, here are some suggestions to help strengthen a relationship.

For introverts, it is important to allow extraverts as much immediate talk-time as possible when they have something they want to share. The two people should agree that the introvert does not necessarily have to respond immediately, but some time should be given to the extravert to express their current ideas. At the same time, it is important for the introvert to come back later and verbalize their thoughts. In this way, the extravert does not always feel like they are the ones doing the “pushing” for discussion. This is especially important around problems or areas of difficulty in the relationship.

Other suggestions include:

For Extraverts:
* Support solitude, processing, and quiet time for your partner.
* Connect with other Extraverts in friendships, groups, and activities.
* Learn to appreciate and enjoy some reflection and slower pace.
* Clarify when you simply are processing and when you have reached a final decision.

Another area where both can compromise is to try developing a group of friends you could join for social activities. This allows for the interaction and stimulation that extraverts enjoy, and may include some new people so the same discussion or activity is not repeated each time. This also allows the introvert to feel more comfortable with people who are known rather than constantly having to engage with strangers. Introverts usually enjoy interacting with people they know, where they can look and act more like extraverts. Such groups could gather around dinners at different people’s houses, card games, dancing, bowling, hiking, biking, or other activities where a common interest also is a part of the relationship.

Other Resources

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