



How to get the most from introverts

INTROVERTED EMPLOYEES BRING MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WORKPLACE, IF YOU KNOW HOW TO MAXIMIZE THEIR IMPACT.

The modern office isn't the ideal workspace for an introvert.

Design trends like open seating and noisy brainstorming can limit productivity and even peace of mind. And our work culture can overlook quieter, more introspective people, even though they provide different ways of thinking and approaching problems.

“People think introverts are withdrawn or that they’re not as quick or as friendly, all of which are completely wrong,” says [Renee Cullinan](#), co-founder and CEO of Stop Meeting Like This, a management consulting firm.

But introverts do need a supportive environment to succeed. Here are some strategies to help get the most out of the introverts within your organization.



Give introverts physical space

It's best to give introverts their own space and the opportunity to get some peace and quiet in the office. Turn a conference room into a library-type space with enforced silence. If you can't designate a whole room, designate certain quiet hours each day.

“It's hard for introverts to work in an open-space environment,” Cullinan says. “Not everybody wants to be slapped on the shoulder every time somebody walks by. They want to be working and thinking.”



Preview group discussions

Before a meeting, explain what will be discussed in detail and provide any relevant background materials. This is good for everyone, but it's particularly useful for introverts, who tend to think carefully about an idea or concept before speaking.

“Introverted thinkers will want to process the information, make sense of it, connect dots in their minds and then share their thoughts about it,” Cullinan says.



Solicit input with care

During a meeting, make sure introverts' viewpoints are heard by going around the table or room and giving everyone time to weigh in, Cullinan says.

Extroverts will jump into a discussion if there's even a moment's pause, but introverts need a bigger window of silence. This also keeps one or two people from monopolizing the conversation.



Keep communication open

After a meeting, make it clear that you still welcome ideas and feedback. This gives introverts a chance to contribute if they're continuing to think or didn't speak up in the meeting. Those ideas might be especially good because they're more developed.

The leader should tell the group, "Let's think about this for 24 hours, and if anyone has further thoughts, shoot me an email," Cullinan says. This reverses the implication that "if you don't get in the game fast, your ideas are going to get passed by."



Don't overlook introverts for big jobs

Make sure you consider introverts when it comes time for promotions or high-visibility assignments. Research shows introverts are a productive part of the workplace; one [study](#) even observed that they're slightly higher-performing CEOs than their extroverted counterparts.

An emerging value in the workplace is “cognitive diversity,” Cullinan says. That means organizations are better when the people who work together have different ways of thinking and viewing the world. Introverted thinkers are an important part of that mix.

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