
A QUIET PERSON'S GUIDE

TO LIFE + WORK



PETE MOSLEY

A Quiet Person's Guide (to life + work)

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His coaching approach is based on years of working 1-1 with Quiet souls and several years of intense action research into this topic within large organisations.

Pete is a tutor on the acclaimed Barefoot Coaching Ltd. International Coaching Federation Post-Graduate Certificate in Business and Personal coaching, writes widely on the topic of quiet, and delivers talks and workshops to organisations seeking to create a more inclusive culture for their quieter/less socially energetic souls.

There is a keynote talk and an interactive workshop exploring the themes of this book – for more details contact Pete here:

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WHAT'S THIS BOOK ABOUT?

“Quiet can be a sanctuary – and it can also be a hiding place. In extremis, it can be a prison. Are you happy with your quiet self, or are you in need of more mobility in your thoughts and actions?” – The Art of Shouting Quietly

When I first read deeply about introversion – quite late in life – it had a huge impact on me. I'd spent many years worried that I was more than a bit odd. In some senses it freed me up to know there were lots of people out there just like me. I was able to make sense of the world at last and find ways to navigate around successfully.

My first book – *The Art of Shouting Quietly* – is aimed fair and square at introverts and quiet souls who find it hard to promote themselves – for whatever reason. It offers them quiet ways to be heard.

In *A Quiet Person's Guide (to life + work)*, I start with a different question. I ask, “Are you quiet by nature, or through force of circumstance?”

What am I offering you?

I want to offer you a different narrative around quiet, to draw the debate away from introversion, ambiversion and extroversion. It's more complex than that.

Quiet may exist for us in the moment. Or it may be an aspect of our character. We may be quiet by nature or become quiet through the impact of life events and circumstances. Whatever happens, the nature of our quiet as an individual is informed by all sorts of things – how we are in the world, our past experience, our immediate context.

I want to shine a light on quiet from many different perspectives, in the hope that it helps you find a different way of defining your own quiet and working with it more effectively.

What might you learn about yourself?

What do you already know about your quietness?

Are you:

- quiet by nature?
- quiet through force of circumstance?
- quiet in the moment?
- quiet now and then?

A few more questions for you:

- Has your quiet developed slowly?
- Has one defining moment driven you deep into yourself?
- Is your quiet to do with a combination of factors – genetics, family systems or learned behaviours?

In *A Quiet Person's Guide to Getting On*, I move towards helpful thinking for quiet people and those who have become quiet. I explore ways and means to get on as a quiet person, to make better progress perhaps, or to step up and make a mark.

It's not just the personality traits of introversion and extroversion that are in play. Extroverted and outgoing people also turn quiet. I explore the whole

'scatter graph' of reasons for quiet: shyness, social anxiety, introversion, dissociation, chronic worry or pain, lack of confidence, etc. Sometimes quiet shows up as a result of several other factors working together.

It's the complex nature of quiet that fascinates me – and how we can make sense of our quietness, reframe it and work with it.

What shifts in your thinking might you expect?

A lot of the pain that quiet people suffer is caused by pressure from others to conform to social norms – to liven up, join in, be less boring, come out of your shell. In this book I explore ways to get out of the trap of trying (or being forced) to mimic more extrovert behaviours. I offer an opportunity to put your quiet nature into context and reframe it as an advantage rather than a hindrance.

My hope is that this book gives you:

- Validation! It's OK to be a quiet soul.
- An end to the upset and confusion caused by not understanding one's own quiet.
- A deeper understanding of how a quiet person's 'being in the world' is uniquely different. As is the extrovert's – there is no better or worse here – it's not a competition.
- A shift from solving 'the problem' of being quiet to living life to the full.
- Acceptance that you have the right to a deep, rich inner life: to be an 'intronaut', to seek out solitude and not have to explain yourself, to be yourself – not what others think or say you should be.

- An escape from ‘comparisonitis’ – worrying that you don’t seem to measure up against other people.
- A deeper insight into the complex nature of quiet – it’s not all about extroversion and introversion.
- A whole host of ‘ninja tips’ to help you grow in confidence and progress.
- A greater ability to notice your changing confidence levels – all the shades between ‘not confident’ and ‘super confident’.
- How to utilise your confidence in the moment and not think of it as a finite thing on a scale of ‘not confident’ to ‘super confident’. It swerves about and we need to be able to swerve with it, noticing and scanning what’s going on for us and reacting accordingly.
- The strength to ignore others’ exhortations to liven up and become more outgoing.
- Strategies for being heard in meetings and at work.
- Ways to collaborate with more vocal friends and teammates so that your preferences can be understood, accepted, and validated.
- Tips on getting noticed by people who can amplify your message – whatever that may be.
- Ways of setting boundaries to minimise the social pressure you experience.

Is this book for you?

Being quiet is an important topic for everyone – for us in our lives and at work, for managers and leaders, for teams and organisations.

This book is for a wide range of people who are quiet or who have become quiet. It's not just for introverts. It's also for people who'd like to understand the inner workings of quiet souls.

It's for:

- Those who know quiet people, love them, and/or work with them
- Anyone who feels their quiet nature blocks them from growing, changing, or participating fully in life
- Anyone who feels pressure to behave in a way they don't want to or feels they are pushed to 'fake it 'til they make it'
- Introverts and quiet people at work who want to make a strong case for a more inclusive culture

- Savvy team leaders who would like to understand their quiet colleagues and take steps towards meeting their needs
- Leaders and managers who want to understand and create a better environment for all their colleagues – irrespective of where they are on the scatter graph of engagement

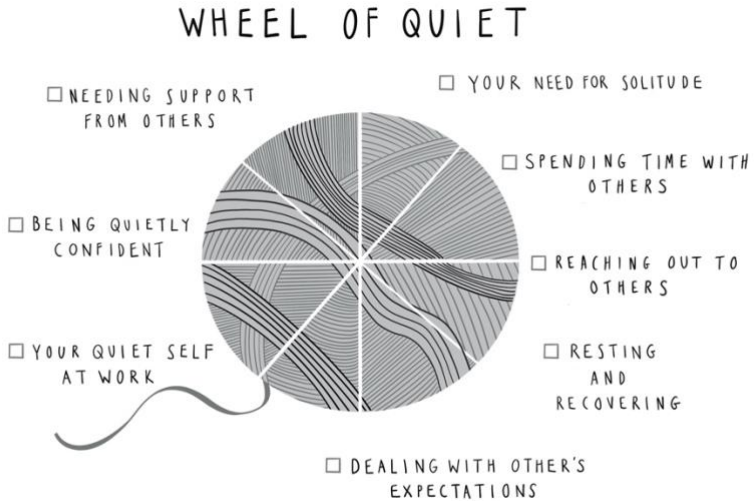
Please note: You may find echoes of yourself in the subject matter of this book. Please seek a skilled helper if you find aspects of your own experience that are uncomfortable or distressing for you. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness – it’s a sign of courage and integrity, a willingness to change and move on. And when people see you are ready for help, they step up. You’ll find what you need to thrive. You’ll find useful contacts and links on the Resources page at the end of the book.

This book will help you come to an understanding of what’s good about your experience of being a quiet person. You’ll be able to decide what you want to keep about being quiet and what you might want to change.

Let’s start now – here in this introduction. Let me invite you to explore what this means for you.

Exercise: Your wheel of quiet

Let's begin by using this simple self-coaching tool to consider your own unique quiet profile.



- Study the wheel, segment by segment.
- Think about what the words in each segment mean for you.
- Write short notes to capture your thoughts on each segment.

Think of the way you currently show up in the world. How does this compare with how you would like to show up in the future?

What would you like to change? Or keep the same? Or have more or less of in your world?

Throughout the book I'll be offering other exercises and experiments to support your thinking. I'd like to suggest that you find a handy notebook where you can keep all your notes in one place. You may want to choose a notebook that's handy to carry around – if you are anything like me, you'll find thoughts popping into your head at all sorts of times and places – capture them as you go along.

What's driven me to write this book?

This is a book about quiet written by a quiet person. It's not another book about introversion written by an introvert. Yes, I have introvert tendencies, but that's just one of many other things that have contributed to my quiet nature throughout my life. The book is informed by action research carried out over a long period of time, one-to-one work with coaching clients, my online group coaching workshops, and years of experience working with the ideas in *The Art of Shouting Quietly*, published in 2015.

Let me share what being quiet means for me. What has fuelled my energy, frustration, and buzz about this topic?

I was a shy little kid. I had a couple of childhood illnesses: one was painful and recurrent over many years; one nearly killed me. It was only later in life that I began to understand how those illnesses and the experiences surrounding them had traumatised me. I found social interaction difficult. I missed out on the rough and tumble that would have toughened me up a bit. I grew up in a quiet household with quiet parents. It was an environment from the 'children should be seen but not heard' era.

I became an anxious teen but didn't know it at the time. Later, when I discovered the concept of anxiety, I couldn't even pronounce the word properly. A psychology student I shared a house with fell over laughing and put me straight.

I learned how to body scan and progressively relax. But it didn't work. I ended up relying on too many beers, to socialise and to sleep. The meditation practice fell by the wayside because I didn't know the nature of the problem I was trying to solve. At the age of 16 I asked my dad to send me to see a psychologist, but he refused. No son of his was going to see a shrink. I didn't cope well and fell into a pattern of risky behaviours as a result.

We all carry pain...

Sometimes we get knocked down and it's a long time before we realise it – a lifetime perhaps. We might, years later, come to a dawning realisation that the life we have lived is not the one we were born to. Trauma occurs, we learn to live with it. Pain, if it is a regular part of life, becomes something we live with, absorb, and tolerate. We become numb, quiet, unresponsive, strangers to ourselves. We come to see pain as normal, and even seek out pain within the relationships we forge

– the familiar being easier than the shock of an easy and trouble-free experience.

In my mid-40s I started reading about introversion. Bingo! I thought. I had an explanation for a hefty chunk of the discomfort I'd felt throughout my adult life. Much of what I read mapped quite accurately onto my life – so much so that it was enough for the moment. I did the tests: I was *clearly* an introvert. Myers–Briggs mapped me out as an INFJ-T – one of 2% of people who had these introverted, intuitive, feeling, and judging attributes. I wore my INFJ like a badge. It explained my intrinsic quietness, linked to my shyness and social anxiety.

Some of the traits I had also seemed to relate to the concept of high sensitivity. I did a Highly Sensitive Person test. Not only was I a highly sensitive person (HSP), but I also rated as an Orchid – the highest level of HSP traits one could have.

I still had my doubts about whether introversion really explained it all. For example, I still had recurring memories of my childhood pain and I knew my edginess and inability to fully chill out must relate to those things that had happened so long ago. But how, exactly?

Many years later, I was whiling away a few hours in a guest house room. I remember it well. It was

sunny, I was laying on the bed having a lazy day, and I picked up my iPad. I was thinking about my innate sensitivity and how my fight/flight radar seemed to be switched on most of the time. I searched for 'hypervigilance'. That led me to an article about post-traumatic stress disorder, which led to another about cPTSD (complex post-traumatic stress disorder). It explained how cPTSD developed because of not one, but many exposures to trauma. I put it together with what I knew of my painful childhood experiences. The alignment between all the different aspects of my experience and cPTSD sent a shudder down my spine. Some of the peripheral symptoms of cPTSD described the bits of my experience that introversion didn't. They explained some of the things I had hitherto understood to be part of my introverted way of being in the world. The earth shifted beneath me in that moment. Within days I sought professional advice and was fast-tracked into therapy.

As a mature adult, getting to grips with the fact that I'd been living with cPTSD since childhood threw my world into disarray. Therapy for me was like a combination of delicate archaeology and bomb disposal – awesome revelations spiked with pain and dismay, followed by a growing sense of peace. I was no longer 'just' an introvert. I knew how and why I chose to withdraw in the way I did, why peace

and quiet were so important to me, and why I was drawn to a simpler and slower way of life.

Since childhood, the classic cPTSD pathway had developed for me like this: repeating patterns of hurt and pain, coupled with no choice as to whether or not they occurred, coupled with no means of escape and only basic explanations of what was going on. It led to utter discombobulation. I screamed, shouted, and resisted. This triggered disapproval, frustration, and anger from those who I needed to be there for me.

Authority figures repeating negative messages ultimately resulted in fear, shame, guilt, low self-esteem – the whole shebang. My parents engaged with the physical facts and the inevitability of it all but wouldn't have realised the potential long-term impact on me. This was the 1960s – that's the way things were – no awareness yet of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and no insight that what was happening to me might generate a lifetime of discomfort. No counselling. No suggestion that medical treatment could traumatise. Medical professionals were gods, and their word was law.

This is why I think it's important to get to the root of your personal experience of quiet – to find your

truth and benefit from the release and renewal that brings.

Think about all the quiet oddballs there are around us. Recognising and nurturing your unique quiet energy is an amazingly empowering thing to do. In some sense it is a political act. You will run counter to the mainstream, and in doing so can create ripples of change that ultimately benefit everyone within your professional and social realm.

Freeing ourselves from labels

Conventional wisdom says that an introvert would struggle in a meeting full of extroverts. If we flip that, does it hold true that an extrovert would struggle in a room full of introverts? Not so much, perhaps?

What if we suspend the use of terms such as introvert and extrovert for the sake of freeing up our thinking? What if we instead use the terms quiet, less energetically engaged, more reflective – compared with more vocal, more energetically engaged, faster processors? Would there be more nuance in the thinking? And if we briefed those who are more energetic to simply take the time to listen to the slower, more reflective thoughts of the quieter souls – what might happen then?

After one of my Quiet Person's Guide courses, a team leader said to me, "I've never been outnumbered by quiet people in a meeting before – it was deeply insightful for me."

A lightbulb had gone on for them. Quiet is a complex thing. At best, labels like introversion and extroversion stop being helpful quite early on in the conversation. At worst, labelling can be a rejection and avoidance of responsibility. A label may impair a person's ability to find help if they need it. In the world of counselling and psychotherapy, the difference between a label of cPTSD and one of borderline personality disorder (two conditions which have many shared facets) can make the difference between successfully accessing treatment or being rejected.

"A diagnosis limits vision: it diminishes ability to relate to the other as a person." – Irvin Yalom, *The Gift of Therapy*

Every quiet person's experience is unique – not to be labelled or reduced – a mix of genes, family system, nurture, lived experience and, above all, context, and circumstance. Your ability to show up – irrespective of whether you believe you are introvert, extrovert or whatever – is hugely dependent on a blend of all these things.

Don't seek to simplify it. Explore it, befriend it. There are opportunities galore hidden within our quiet.

“Be yourself – not what other people think, or say, you should be. You have the power and the right to create your own framework of possibility.”

The Art of Shouting Quietly

UNDERSTANDING YOUR QUIET SELF

What brings you here?

Do you think you might be an introvert? Are you quiet for some other reason? Would it be useful to test your assumptions?

There's an upset and confusion caused by not understanding one's own quiet. It may feel like you are flying blind – something's amiss but you're not sure what... you can't quite join the dots. It can feel something like this:

- What just happened there?!
- Something going on below the surface.
- Hampered because you can't see what you don't know.

So, there's a temptation to find a label, a diagnosis if you like, to feel more comfortable. But labels are reductionist – they don't consider your current situation and context, nor your experience, nor your hopes and intentions.

What do others say about you?

Upset and confusion can also be caused by how others react to you. At worst by name calling, labelling, and belittling. At best by trying to help – offering support through inappropriate suggestions: don't be shy, you'll be OK once you've dipped your toe in the water, fake it 'til you make it, etc.

Through genuine misunderstanding, people misread signals. They can project their own values and experience on to you, or read your quietness as aloofness and superiority, rather than the painful social paralysis that can lie underneath.

What stories do you tell yourself?

Is your quiet a sanctuary, a hiding place, or a prison? Solitude or loneliness? What are the negative messages you carry about yourself that are not relevant?

And what positive messages can you use to provide balance?

- It's OK to feel different – to march to a different drum.
- Tune down the critics – both your inner critic and the ones that tell you to 'liven up'.

- Explore the world from your own unique starting point – not where others tell you that you should be.

What's the nature of your quiet?

This section is an invitation to think about all the bits and pieces that are part of your experience of being a quiet soul.

Quiet behaviour, energy levels, context and confidence all interrelate. This means that traditional ways of measuring things – such as the linear scales of introversion (introvert/ambivert/extrovert) and confidence (not confident/super confident) – are only a snapshot of our reality.

Confidence is a mercurial quality that ebbs and flows for everyone, and we all have our own 'brand' of confidence. Introverts and quieter folk show up across a scatter graph, demonstrating a range of behaviours they feel comfortable with at any given time.

This explains the person who is extremely good at presenting and leading but is terrified by the feelings of social anxiety that accompany attending

a dinner party. The ebb and flow of self-belief (internal narrative) also plays a part.

And, of course, all of this changes constantly according to the context we are in and how we are feeling on the day. Quiet people often say they find themselves much more confident in some contexts than others. A lot of that has to do with how safe, or not, we feel in the moment. Remembering exactly where and when we have felt confident, and what was going on around us at that moment, can be used as data to support our growth.

Our confidence and energy levels – and the behaviours we show as a result – are under our control more than we sometimes think.

What is an introvert?

A short search reveals many definitions and synonyms – but all broadly along the same lines. Introversion typically comes across as negative, extroversion as positive.

Everyday definitions and synonyms

Introvert:

- A quiet, shy person who finds it difficult to talk to people (Collins English Dictionary).
- Shy, quiet, prefers to spend time alone rather than often being with other people (Cambridge English Dictionary).
- Brooder, egoist, narcissist, solitary, wallflower, loner, autist.

Extrovert:

- Very active, lively, and friendly (Collins English Dictionary).
- An energetic person who enjoys being with other people (Cambridge English Dictionary).
- Gregarious person, life of the party, character, showboat, exhibitionist, show-off.

One wonders who writes these things! I'd encourage you if you haven't already, to look at definitions of solitude, introspection, and loneliness.

Shyness can attract a negative definition too:
“Shyness has a strange element of narcissism, a belief that how we look, how we perform, is truly important to other people.” – Andre Dubus

There is also the notion of fierce independence. People who are fiercely independent find it hard to ask for help. They try to do everything themselves, and they expect to have to do things by themselves. They struggle to maintain relationships or get anxious creating connections with others.

You might like to compare this with ‘Apanthropy’ – the desire to be away from other people and to be left alone (an 18th-century term).

Also, this – Ambedo (n) A kind of melancholic trance in which you become completely absorbed in vivid sensory details.

Another lovely word I found – one which I personally associate with – is ‘intronaut’: an individual who explores or reflects on her or his own mind and thoughts in search of meaning and understanding of ‘self’.

Cultural differences

Different cultures value quiet in different ways. Western and Eastern attitudes to quiet are very different. Some cultures view quiet as an acceptable, desirable trait, contrasting with the more negative perception that's common in the UK and US.

Psychological descriptions

A growing awareness of introversion is calling for clearer explanations. Psychologists across the board discuss introversion (and extroversion) from a wide range of perspectives. Some say that the introversion/ambiversion/extroversion labels may be a handy ready reckoner but aren't terribly accurate. Some wonder if the phenomenon really exists.

“His retreat into himself is not a final renunciation of the world, but a search for quietude, where alone it is possible for him to make his contribution to the life of the community.” – Carl Jung, Psychological Types

Interestingly, in the world of psychological models, introversion is often defined by what it is not – by the elements of extroversion that are missing.

What does it feel like to be quiet?

It's important to recognise that the definitions, diagnoses, labels, and opinions of others are exactly that – external quantification of your highly nuanced internal experiences. It's much more important to familiarise yourself and make friends with your own unique experience of being in the world.

In the face of this complexity, the STAR model was developed. Instead of relying on psychological theory, psychologist Jonathan Cheek asked introverts about their day-to-day experiences. This research led to a model of four different types of introverts: Social, Thinking, Anxious and Restrained:

- **Social introverts** like being at home and going out with a select few.
- **Thinking introverts** are often deep in thought, wondering about themselves and the world, but not necessarily avoiding the company of others.
- **Anxious introverts** self-isolate and avoid situations where they might feel anxious or self-conscious.

- **Restrained introverts** think hard before speaking, take time to ‘warm up’ and shy away from spontaneity.

Your body keeps a tab on experiences of discomfort, anxiety, and trauma. And we can often associate feeling quiet with physical sensations: blushing easily, an enhanced startle response, tension in your body, feeling inhibited or locked up, that you can't move freely, that you are armouring. You may recognise none, some, or all of these things.

We may experience more subtle physical sensations. What else do you feel when you are quiet? And where do you feel it? Where in your body? Is it light or heavy? Is it dull or sharp? Or nothing at all?

In my own experience, through somatic coaching, I discovered that I was experiencing what's called sensory amnesia – years of my protecting myself had led to my body working within a surprisingly limited range of movement and feeling. I progressively learned to regain the lost feeling and movement, stage by stage.

What senses are active within your awareness of your quiet?

- What do you see, hear, feel, taste, smell?
- What emotions are present for you?

What practical, day-to-day impacts do you deal with when you are quiet?

- Unsuccessful attempts to join in?
- Feeling isolated, left out or excluded by others?
- Microaggressions, teasing or even bullying?

Are you able to thrive in the way you'd like to?

- Are there times when you feel like you are wading through treacle?
- Are there times when you can't get the wind beneath your sails?
- Are there times when you feel safe – when you can open up?

Understanding our quiet is not about focusing on problems all the time. It's about finding ways to liberate ourselves – to live life to the full.

We cannot thrive in places where we feel isolated, marginalised, or belittled. Nor can we survive alone,

or at least it makes life really difficult. We need to come together with others. And we'll look at strategies for that later.

The many reasons for quiet

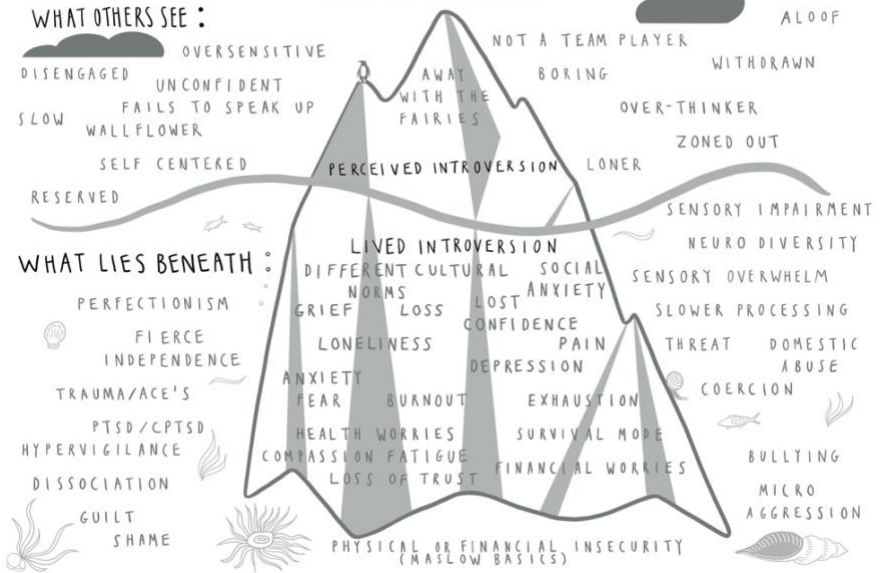
This iceberg illustration sets out some of the things that can conspire and combine to make us quiet or reluctant to speak up.

Above the waterline it shows what others see and say. Below the waterline it shows a whole variety of circumstances and influences that may contribute to quiet behaviour.

Take a moment to scan it over. What do you notice? You may spot one or two things that might be contributing to your quiet. If so, make a note of them – but keep an open mind. Stay curious, stay with the ambiguity and uncertainty of not fully understanding what's going on. Keep reading – things may fall into place. Stay with the 'not knowing' for now.

Trigger Warning: If you find this a bit overwhelming, set it aside, and return to this exercise after catching your breath. It may need a couple of visits.

THE ICEBERG OF QUIET



Exercise: What makes you quiet?

In scanning the iceberg, what do you notice? Anything from the list below? If so, how do these things show up for you? Infrequently? Now and again? Or are they a regular feature of daily life?

Just note your observations down for now. Here are a few prompts:

- Shyness – including feeling socially exposed.
- Cultural differences to do with eye contact, speaking up, deferring to others.
- Criticism in early years from parents or teachers, or later from partner.
- Perfectionism – my contribution won't be good enough.
- Imposter syndrome – I'm not qualified to offer my opinion.
- A positive or negative personal narrative – I'm not credible.
- Social anxiety – I'm tongue-tied, and I'll mess up.
- Pain – I'm distracted and can't focus.
- Grief – I'm disoriented and vulnerable.
- Hidden disability – I'm in pain and can't concentrate for long periods.
- Hearing impairment – I can't hear properly, and I'm scared to admit it.

- Dyslexia or dyspraxia – I perceive the world differently.
- ADHD – I’m hyper focused one minute and disorganised the next.
- Financial worries – I feel sick to my stomach all the time and can’t focus.
- Being a carer – I’m worrying about my mum, partner, or child.
- Domestic abuse, violence, or trauma – I’m scared of conflict.
- Neurodiversity – social rules can be confusing.
- Diversity of thinking – that’s not a familiar way of thinking for me.
- ACEs, PTSD, and dissociation – I zone out when stressed.
- Hypervigilance – I’m on edge, full of stress hormones.
- Loneliness – lack of warmth and human connection.
- I fear conflict, so I’ll agree with you in order to avoid it.

As we move through the book, I’ll look at how we might take account of some of these things in our lives – and how we might choose to work with them, mitigate them or get support with them.

Beginnings are important



Whether it's down to nature or nurture, our early years often determine whether we operate comfortably as social beings or not. The environment we grow up in and the messages we receive affect our skills and confidence as social beings. Our childhood experience is key.

For me it was a mix of childhood illness, scary and painful treatment, knocked confidence, missing out on childhood rough and tumble, and quiet parents, with shy and anxious behaviour developing as a result.

Therefore, when we grow up to be quiet adults, it's not always classic introversion. Sometimes it's a

real mix of context, nurture and circumstance that conspire to make us quiet.

We are not the same, you and me. And sometimes we need a hand to develop the skills to fit in, feel comfortable and be at ease.

“It’s OK to be quiet, introverted, shy, retiring, unconfident, marching to a different drum. All of these things can be turned into advantages. This book will encourage you to become ninja-like in the application of your strengths rather than fretting about your weaknesses.” – The Art of Shouting Quietly

Family hierarchy

There is some research – based on a large sample – that says your place in the family hierarchy has something to do with this:

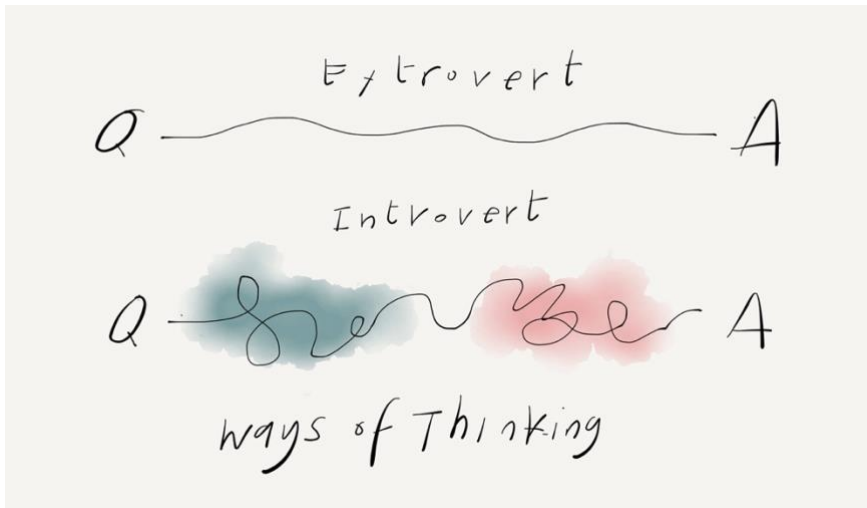
- Eldest children are slightly more likely to be introverts.
- Middle children are less likely to be introverts (and more likely to be extroverts).
- Youngest children are very slightly more likely to be introverts than they are extroverts.
- Only children are less likely to be introverts.

Source: Truity: www.truity.com/blog/birth-order-and-personality-study

While there might be truth in this, my own hunch is that so much more of our quiet is affected in real time by what's going on around us and in our deeper lives.

Neurobiological differences

We are learning more from neurobiology every day about the differences between introverts and extroverts. We're learning about how we respond differently to our surroundings, how we process stimuli in different ways and at different speeds. And we're learning about the different hormones that are involved in these processes.



Dopamine

Dopamine is associated with rapid processing of information. In popular culture and media, dopamine is often portrayed as the main chemical of pleasure. But the current opinion in

pharmacology is that dopamine amplifies signals about the desirability or aversiveness of an outcome, which in turn propels our behaviour toward or away from achieving that outcome.

Extroverts thrive on dopamine. They enjoy the repetitive dopamine 'hits' that keep them energised. So, they seek out the activities and interactions that are associated with it. They recharge through interaction.

The functions of dopamine and adrenaline are linked. Oxygenation of dopamine yields noradrenaline, which is converted into adrenaline. This explains why dopamine is implicated in adrenaline-fuelled behaviours: snap decision-making, going at things full throttle, our flight/fight/freeze modes.

Acetylcholine

Quiet people generally process information more slowly using the acetylcholine pathway which rewards quieter, slower activities: reading, thinking, walking. These activities are linked to production of oxytocin and serotonin, hormones associated with slower processing and more thoughtful decision-making. Quiet people recharge through spending time alone.

Acetylcholine is the chief neurotransmitter of the parasympathetic nervous system, the part of the autonomic nervous system that contracts smooth muscles, dilates blood vessels, increases bodily secretions, and slows heart rate.

N.B. Quiet people need dopamine too – but in a different way. Dopamine is vital to motivation. It's the reward of dopamine that keeps us quiet folk striving too. It's not a bad thing. It's just not the thing that underpins our thinking patterns.

The default mode network

The default mode network (DMN) is best known for being active when the brain is at wakeful rest, such as during daydreaming and mind wandering. It is also active when we think about others, think about ourselves (our autobiographical awareness), remember the past and plan for the future.

It is also associated with tendencies towards rumination, and depression.

Additionally, trauma can impact the function of the default mode network, upsetting our ability to remember and link our memories to our other mental activities.

If one has a tendency towards self-criticism or impostor thinking, living in default mode is uncomfortable. It's a breeding ground for lots of uncomfortable feelings.

If you find it hard to chill, basically you're unable to stay in default mode. If you're one of those people who find it hard to relax – or indeed panic whenever you try to – working on making peace with default mode might offer a solution.

Research shows that if we adopt a spiritual practice – meditation perhaps, or seeking out experiences of awe and wonder, instances of depression decrease. These things allow us to sink deeper into default mode. Effectively, we become more at peace with ourselves. When we learn to settle well into default mode, we can experience real joy and connectedness. We can drop into a sense of *being* at one with ourselves and our surroundings. Everybody benefits.

Awe, wonder and transcendence are essential components of a healthy life..

Like the moment perhaps, when a ray of sun strikes a panel of stained glass at just the right angle to make it sing, or when you witness the heart-stopping energy of an electrical storm, or see a trout

leaping in a stream whilst you sit in a moment of stillness.

Research shows that experiences of awe and wonder help us transcend our everyday frames of reference, expand our mental models, get us 'out of ourselves' and towards more compassionate and generous behaviours.

It's important to create the space in life and work to allow ourselves access to special moments. To create the opportunity for them to arrive with us.

List the things that take your breath away - then actively go find them.

They are there in the nooks and crannies of everyday existence.

Relaxation induced anxiety

It's a thing! There are some of us who react badly to any deliberate attempt to relax. The sensations of reduction in heart rate and muscle tension that accompany relaxation can induce even greater feelings of anxiety. There is a section in this book on grounding techniques. Grounding is one recognised way to counter this phobia.

If you are a driven person, you may recognise this – you start to relax and then suddenly find yourself leaping out of your chair to DO something. You leap out of default mode, into action again. It's a big red flag for those of us who simply can't slow moving.

Nurture and environment

The things grownups say to us when we are small sink in. From our earliest moments, we hear injunctions and beliefs spoken out loud by others – value-laden statements and stories that become our reality:

- “Little children should be seen but not heard.”
- “Stop that noise.”
- “Don't cry.”
- “Be quiet.”

When statements like this are repeated over time by someone 'in authority', and when there is high emotion present, stubborn beliefs are formed.

Some of this can be what psychology describes as introjection. Introjection is a process in which an individual unconsciously incorporates aspects of their external reality into the self, particularly attitudes, values and qualities or a part of another

person's personality. These may be a force for good or bad.

Similarly, behaviours can become ingrained habits when someone requires or demands quiet behaviour over time: "Be quiet, I'm working."

How do we respond to these demands? Do we comply, adapt, or rebel? Does our response change over time? What quiet habits do we develop?

Shyness

Many people live with their shyness quite happily – most of the time. While a shy person may always avoid the spotlight, being shy does not keep them from engaging with the world around them, trying new things or having close relationships.

Social anxiety

Social anxiety disorder is a more extreme experience and a recognised condition. In a social situation, someone with social anxiety disorder can experience the following:

- shortness of breath
- feeling dizzy
- going red

- heart races
- shakiness
- perspiring
- difficulty getting their words out
- forgetting what they were going to say or do
- feeling sick
- becoming tense.

The key difference between shyness and social anxiety disorder is the degree to which they affect your life in a negative way.

Fierce independence

Parental nurture plays a strong part in the way we develop. According to attachment theory, if our parents don't show up usefully when we need them, we can develop a fierce sense of independence in order to survive.

This can indicate what psychologists call an avoidant attachment style, which may develop when primary caregivers are emotionally distant or absent when a child really needs emotional support. This can happen when medical treatments interrupt the flow of parental care, or when too much emphasis is placed on academic achievement or personal independence, or when a child's emotional demands are perceived as neediness – all to the detriment of the parent–child relationship.

Our lived experiences

Sometimes in early childhood life gets fraught. When it does, it can influence our behaviours later in life. I want to touch on a few examples. Some of these may resonate for you. Some may suggest scenarios you may not have considered that you want to explore further.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

These are stressful events occurring in childhood. Most commonly they include experiencing the breakup of your family, living with a parent with an addiction or mental health condition, or being the victim of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. They can also involve distressing experiences, including repeated painful medical treatments, or witnessing terrifying things happening to others who are close to us.

ACEs are quite common. More than two-thirds of people have experienced one ACE, and nearly a quarter have experienced three or more.

There is a correlation between the number of ACEs experienced and increased chances of problems later in life, such as serious physical illness, depression, substance abuse, smoking, poor academic achievement, and early death.

I'd like to stress that not everyone who experiences one ACE, or several, will have a difficult outcome. Some people grow despite them. Some, having got the help they need, experience a spurt of post-traumatic growth. We all respond in our own way. Resolved or not, ACEs create toxic stress which can impair our immune system. More on that later.

Trauma, PTSD and cPTSD

While trauma has many definitions, in psychology it typically refers to an experience of serious adversity or terror, or the emotional or psychological response to that experience.

Most people are familiar with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can result from a single incident such as a natural disaster, a car accident, or a shooting. However, there is a second, closely related condition called complex post-traumatic stress disorder (cPTSD). This results from repeated trauma over months or years, rather than just a single event.

The symptoms of PTSD include flashbacks or nightmares, avoidance of situations that might trigger a memory of the event, changes in the way you think about yourself, hypervigilance (being 'on edge' a lot of the time), plus bodily symptoms related to the traumatic event.

Symptoms of cPTSD additionally include difficulty with emotional regulation, feeling detached or dissociated, poor self-esteem, often coupled with relationship difficulties.

Intergenerational trauma

“Intergenerational trauma can mask itself through learned beliefs, behaviours, and patterns that become engrained. This kind of wiring impacts personalities, relationships, parenting, communication, and views of the world.” – Melanie English PhD, quoted in *Health* magazine

As an example of this, my dad was at sea throughout the Second World War, delivering oil via large convoys that were prone to attack. I know from conversations with my mum that he wasn't in a great state when he came home – not physically injured, but badly shaken up. He didn't talk about his experiences – not even to my mum. He did spend long periods of time on his own – I can remember him seeming miles away at times. He also had a series of physical tics. I didn't think about these growing up, but I came to recognise them later. He'd sit and rub his forehead gently but rhythmically, tap his foot gently in mid-air while his legs were crossed, and clench and unclench his jaw almost imperceptibly. He enjoyed going fishing on his own and expressed his need for peace and quiet fairly forcibly if us kids played up or were too boisterous in his presence. He was quite a solitary chap and demonstrated many typical 'introvert' traits. He'd swerve into a doorway to avoid an

awkward encounter with someone coming towards him.

As I became older, I too self-soothed, enjoyed my own company, rubbed my head, tapped my foot, and sought solitude from the frantic social activity of my college life. I too would avoid people unless I had enough social energy to engage with them. I had no explanation for this until I reframed these behaviours in the light of response to intergenerational trauma.

The many benefits of quiet



Exercise: What are your quiet superpowers?

Let's try a thought experiment here. For a whole multitude of reasons, quiet people often find themselves with perceptual gifts: sensitivities, high-level observational skills, a finely tuned social 'radar'. These are often developed unconsciously as a survival strategy. Reframe these characteristics and you soon realise just how useful they can be.

Grab your notebook and see if you can list your own quiet gifts. And be prepared to flip some things that you previously thought of as weaknesses!

Here are a few starting points. Please feel free to add your own.

- Quiet confidence.
- Powers of observation.
- The ability to listen and ask great questions.
- The ability to notice things that others miss.
- Thoughtful responses that emerge from thinking longer and deeper.

- Well-rounded viewpoints.
- An ability to take the views of others on board.
- A natural tendency to create space for pondering and reflecting.
- The tendency to avoid urgency and create more space to think.
- The power to make well-formed decisions.

Understanding as much as we can about our quiet helps us notice and celebrate our superpowers. But it's just a start. The next step is to become more comfortable in using them. And that requires the confidence and resilience we gain when we tap into our values.

That's what we're going to work on next.

BUILDING QUIET CONFIDENCE

What is confidence?

We often bundle a lack of confidence with quietness, shyness, and introversion. That's a mistake. First, it's a huge generalisation. Second, that faulty perception can turn those who have lost confidence, through force of circumstance, away from asking for the help they need. Extroverts suffer lapses of confidence too.

Confidence is a mercurial quality that ebbs and flows for all of us throughout our lives. We have our confidence one minute. The next it's gone. And then it's back again, often in a different form.

We can be supremely confident in lots of areas, and then undermine our confidence if we underperform in just one area that grows in importance because we – or others – have highlighted the gap.

I've worked with a great many people who have been successful in many domains – successful with money, successful creatively, successful in making change or in leadership. And I've often thought that these folk must be supremely confident. Then, as I've got to know them and work with them, I find they're just like you and me. Like us, they have

pockets of confidence here and there, and they've learned how to use them to their advantage. They might do surprisingly well just working within those narrow bands of confidence.

We all have to find our own brand of confidence and use it wisely, wherever we can. I don't think confidence is a linear scale from 'I am not confident' to 'I am supremely confident'. We all pop up on our own unique existential scatter graph of self-belief, with little pockets of confidence here and there.

It's how we make those pockets of confidence work for us that can make the difference between success and failure. And this involves exploiting areas where we do have confidence – and not worrying too much about where we feel less confident.

Staying confident in the face of uncertainty

An analogy I use when I'm coaching is to think of confidence as the movement of a climber up a cliff face or traversing a rock face. It's rare for climbers to climb freehand. They often have pitons – or metal wedges – which they ram into crevices in the rock face, make secure and rope up to. Then they can just sit there and wait and think about the next move, secure in the moment, knowing they've claimed that space for now, preparing to move forward when they're ready.

I often ask people to draw their own mountain or cliff face. I ask them to imagine where each piton could go in, what that might represent and how they might feel secure in that step. Then I encourage them to begin to imagine where the next step might be, and the next step after that.

It's OK to start thinking about confidence as something that comes and goes – we don't need to feel it every moment and every hour of every day. We can claim it whenever we need it – in the here and now – putting aside worries about our troubled past or our anxiety about an uncertain future.

We just need to secure our confidence, step by step, by banging in a piton or ramming a wedge into the crevice. By feeling secure in the moment, we can take the time we need to consider, with quiet confidence, what our next step will be.



Your relationship with confidence

Quiet confidence is an enviable thing. If you can keep your head when others are losing the plot, you'll show up in people's eyes as a highly credible person. Thinking through your relationship with confidence is a powerful exercise. It'll help you internalise the confidence you already have, gain insight into the pockets of confidence you can transfer to other areas of your life and figure out where you can direct your efforts to grow your confidence further.

Please believe this – no one is confident everywhere, all the time. Some people may be capable of maintaining an illusion of this. But that is exactly what it is – an illusion.

I'll offer an example. I was useless at sport – so much so that I was never picked for teams and got side-lined. My coping mechanism was to retire to the school library, where I became an avid reader. I learned to explore the world widely through words and pictures. I became confident in grasping ideas and understanding how they all fitted together. I gained skills that were not acknowledged at the time but have served me well ever since.

What about you? You may be an excellent swimmer, charity fundraiser, cook, parent, golfer, knitter, gardener, banjo player... There will be pockets of high confidence there somewhere – and any or all of these are relevant.

This is the key thing...

People who show up with a lack of confidence often relate it to work or relationship issues, an area that they – or others – have prioritised as important. I feel it is important to identify *any* high levels of confidence in *all* areas of our lives. Our strengths give us a solid foundation from which to grow in areas that we find more challenging.

For example, you could be struggling to participate confidently at work but may be a key member of a choir or community group. You may struggle to project manage work tasks but may be a superb cook who can create wonderful and complex dishes. This is where this exercise can really help. Remembering what you are already good at, and why, can help create a secure platform from which to grow. Only then are you ready to work on any limiting beliefs that are getting in your way.

Exercise: Where are your pockets of confidence?



Grab your notepad and let's begin mapping this out.

Draw a timeline of your life. Think hard about the times and places in your life where you have ever displayed confidence. Take your thinking back, as far as school perhaps. Map every high point, like in the illustration above. Or, if you prefer, simply jot down times and events where you did things confidently and competently.

Try not to linger on places where others expressed a negative opinion. Instead, identify what's worked for you. Don't discount anything! If it's an example of confidence, however small, capture it!

Note that this exercise stays well away from listing areas where you are not confident. That would simply reinforce any negative beliefs. Instead, focus on where you are confident already. This exercise benefits from showing yourself huge measures of kindness and celebrating your high points.

Finally, think about this and jot down your thoughts:

- Who says you must build your confidence? If that voice is yours – great!
- If that voice comes from someone else – is it a fair ask?

Or is it a sign that you're in a situation that needs to flex more in the direction of quiet people and their natural strengths? I'll dig into that much deeper later in the book.

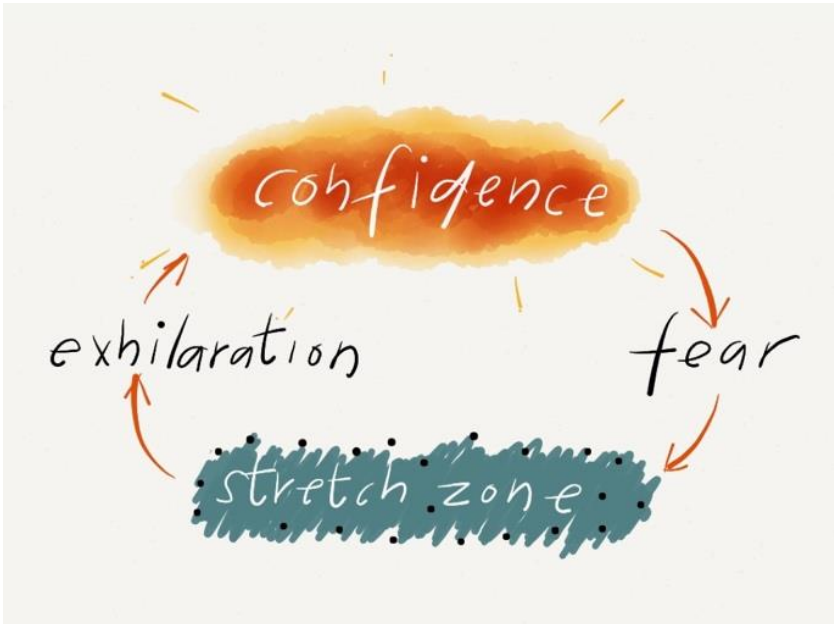
Boosting confidence stage by stage

I'm wary of those who generalise about confidence being a skill we can all develop (although we can) without also acknowledging the many blocks and beliefs that can stop us from even trying to boost our own confidence. For some it's simply a step too far to be told that they can overcome their fear of public speaking, for instance, through practice. They can, of course. But it helps to understand the mechanisms of self-limiting beliefs and the neuroscience around change, so they can tackle them first.

Why is it so hard to change our behaviour? In her amazing book *Seven and a Half Lessons About the Brain*, Lisa Feldman Barrett explains that keeping things the same reduces metabolic cost. Learning something increases metabolic cost. The brain is not for thinking; its primary purpose is to keep your autonomic nervous system balanced for the purposes of survival. It favours its familiar shortcuts. New ways of doing things have a higher cost in metabolic load, so the brain diverts us back towards safe and familiar territory. That's why the idea of change feels so hard sometimes.

We need to employ a thing called neuroplasticity to get some success here. We need to make use of

our brain's capacity to build new neural networks. By approaching change in tiny, incremental steps, we can make changes without loading our brain quite so much. And, in time, the new habits get accepted without setting off the alarm bells.



And change can happen in a moment too. A simple reframe or incisive question can sometimes elicit rapid change.

If you imagine you could achieve that difficult thing – what would be the steps you would need to take in order to do so? Can you identify the resources

you might need? Who could you ask for help?
Answer those questions and you'll find your way.

I use this illustration a lot to show how we develop our confidence step by step. We can move slowly from one level of confidence to the next, but not without going through our 'stretch zone' and experiencing the exhilaration that comes with success at each stage.

Fear is an inevitable part of this cycle. But the exhilaration we feel with each gain cements new memories of being successful at a higher level of confidence than ever before. And so, the cycle continues, step by step.

Making friends with your fears

People often think that feelings of discomfort, anxiety or fear will simply disappear as their confidence increases. Not so. 'Performance' in any public arena automatically has fears and stresses associated with it. And for a good reason. The best actors, public speakers and leaders will all admit to willingly embracing nerves, stage fright, performance anxiety, even physical sickness at times.

Why? Because they know we make the real discoveries about ourselves and our true

capabilities when we are willing to get into the zones that produce those side effects. They are not fearless. They choose to embrace the fear. You won't get the exhilaration of the ride if you don't step onto the rollercoaster in the first place.

I know, from personal experience, that these first steps are never easy. And, as a coach, I encourage others to work steadily round this cycle – step by step – building a solid foundation of confidence.

How can we reduce the fear factor as we go round this cycle?

- Remember that you are not alone – even highly experienced people are anxious under pressure.
- Don't try to battle your fear – make friends with it, become familiar with its physical sensations.
- Give it a name – “Oh! That's just my public speaking wobbles again.” Naming it helps you identify it as a thought pattern that you can disrupt.
- Think about your greater goal – not just the current task. What's the bigger, longer-term goal you are going to achieve?
- Keep a journal of all your successes – every single one counts.

- Give yourself credit for your past successes. We tend to forget all the great things we've done in the past.
- Aim to be a little bit braver every day.

The types of goal you choose can be pivotal in whether you achieve them or not. For example, a goal that demands big things in unfamiliar territory may stop you in your tracks.



On the other hand, you could reset it as a series of small step learning goals where you can enjoy making progress and you feel you have agency.

That way you are in charge and the change can happen more freely.

The most important thing is that it's intrinsic – it comes from inside you – and you really want the outcome because it's personally meaningful.

Finding courage in bigger goals

In my work, I regularly meet folks who struggle to meet their goals. Sometimes that's because the goal they have in mind doesn't seem to justify all the pain they'll encounter achieving it, especially if it involves scary feelings or the potential for embarrassment. It doesn't matter whether the goal is planning a talk, setting up a new social media feed, putting a photo of yourself on your 'About Me' page or getting to grips with your first website. Collywobbles, fear of being found out and 'comparisonitis' all conspire to stop progress in its tracks.

Counterintuitively, setting an even greater goal can be the very thing that helps the personal breakthrough come about. Usually, this higher goal is around actualising your deeper intentions.

Here's an example. A client wanted to overcome her fear of public speaking. The very thought of standing in front of an audience filled her with dread. She was clear that 'doing the talk' was her primary goal. But progress was very slow.

I asked her to imagine what she really wanted the outcome to be – not giving the talk, but the rewards that might flow from creating and delivering it. She

found it easy to identify her greater goals: a higher profile, getting her work in front of a whole new audience, being seen to have expertise and knowledge to share, and the enhanced opportunities for human connection she would experience. She began to view the whole challenge in a fresh light.

Next, we chose a selection of images that represented the subject she was passionate about and showed her work in the best light.

I chose an image at random and asked her to explain what it meant to her. The words just flowed intuitively. She spoke without hesitation and in a natural and authentic way. She realised that if she was talking about her passion, the words would flow, and a tightly written script would not be necessary. This freed up her thinking and turned a fearful chore into an exciting opportunity.

Identifying and visualising her bigger goal gave this person the courage and motivation to step up and get things moving!

What are you not doing, simply because you haven't clearly identified your greater goal?

Quiet Determination

‘Cuticles first’ – an exploration of quiet determination. In conversation with coach and cross channel swimmer, Polly Downes.

Hi Polly, what I think I've received from you is that in some circumstances, you're a very gregarious person. And you like company and you like going out and you enjoy being with people. And at the other end of the scale, you really enjoy your peace and quiet and your solitude and getting away from it all. And being with the water and the wild.

“It's a fairly recent thing to discover, my need for quiet. As a child, I was extremely shy. I can still remember how it felt when my mum would say, ‘Say thanks for having me, or say hello’ and hiding behind her leg and the excruciating, excruciating feeling and literally not being capable of speech. I couldn't get the words out. I know that's still part of me, but I think I've found loads of coping mechanisms to not feel that excruciating pain.

Can you tell me a little about those coping mechanisms?

‘One thing that I'm conscious of that I apply to pretty much everything scary in life is this. I remember

having my new-born baby in my hands and having never even changed a nappy, and thinking, well 1000's of women do this every day who have none of the privileges that I have. I am very well equipped to deal with this if anyone can, I can, like kind of think that in loads of situations like 'of course I can talk to them anyone can'. I think it's a kind of self-taught thing that there's an inner voice that shuts up the shy voice and that's useful.'

What is it that draws you towards the water and the wild?

“I think there's an inner peace. A sense of being completely inconsequential to the size of the universe that I find really liberating in a way. It's a switching off from all the noise that is my day-to-day life and appreciating things like the incredible intricacy of the bark on a tree for example. In the water, it's a much more physical experience. It's sensation, and it's the feeling of weightlessness. Something to do with the cold or maybe the vastness of it. I don't practice in an indoor swimming pool. I don't get the same sense of Zen.

The outdoor heated pool I use is nearly 100 meters long, so you don't have to turn so you can go for a long time and get into a rhythm that's like a

meditation. And, of course, the sea also has no end.”

At what point did you consciously decide to swim as a challenge?

“I took it on as a personal challenge at probably one of my lowest and most lost points. It was around the time that I realized that my marriage was over and I'd kind of lost myself. I think it was that real sense of being lost in myself and needing to find who I am and to give myself some space. I think swimming gives me what most people get from meditation - space, and a lightness. A freedom. And it's linked to adventure. It gives me opportunities for adventure.

Cold water swimming is quite significant. It's a brain reset. It's like a total recalibration of the brain followed by feelings of euphoria.

The competition side of the cross-channel relay was different. That was completely an internal competition. I was quite private about it. I didn't really want people to know about it. Also, I was hugely motivated by the team because my biggest fear was that I'd mess up and ruin it for everybody.

I need something extra because I need to do more than just have fun with friends.

In respect of the 2023 solo channel swim, it doesn't feel like the goal is swimming the channel. I think the goal is knowing I can do it. And I don't know if that makes sense. The thing that really spurred me on to do the relay was around that sense of being lost and thinking I can do it and I think in my head knowing that the channel swim is one of the greatest achievements humans do.

The sea to me has a real sense of being held by the universe. I'm not religious. I'm sure it is the equivalent of people who feel like God is holding them or whoever but for me, it is this sense of what will be will be and it doesn't really matter what I think or what I do because the world is going to happen.

Which is interesting because I have a very strong locus of control.”

What happens to your experience of time while you are in the water?

‘When I’m swimming it's like that time has just gone and there's such freedom in that space where nothing really matters. My experience of swimming the channel was that it was terrifying. It was two in the morning, and I had to jump off the boat four

hours into English Channel. And it didn't feel it was just something I had to do. I don't know how I could have rationalized it in my head, but I just jumped in and then this sense of there was a sense of I could die, and I and it didn't matter. If I did because that was what was that is what the universe intended. For me. I did it was such a strong feeling and that is my kind of that to me is like a real anchor in when I need to get back to a space of clear headedness. Was at six in the morning as the sunrise came up and it was just unbelievably beautiful pink, yellow, golden sunrise. And it was so amazing. And I remember thinking this is the most incredible privilege.

I get bored easily. So, I can't just go and swim. I just be bored with a 5km swim. There's a woman who I go every to couple of months for a coaching session because she teaches me how to swim in an economical way for endurance rather than trying to do my fastest ever 25 metres.'

What do you gain from that?

'It's all around tiny details. Like have your hand enter the water cuticles first. I have to just do 10 metre chunks with cuticles first until I've completely got that or focus on something like that for two weeks and not actually swim at all.

So, before I did the channel my longest swim was a 10-mile swim in the Thames. Before I'd done that, I don't think I'd ever swum more than a couple of kilometres. She just said it doesn't matter. Your body knows what to do, and it'll just keep doing it. It's not really about your body, knowing that it travelled that distance.

That's an unusual approach but it really worked for me and again, it feels a bit more spiritual. It's the repetition, repetition, repetition, that I think causes that sense of timelessness.

That's interesting, and it's very different to how most people would think you would approach that kind of endurance task.

The channel is chunks of one hour. The 10-mile swim took me ages. It might have been four or five hours. I totally lost track of time and found it really discombobulating. I had to get out at one point to walk around a lock. And I remember just thinking I wasn't safe to walk because I was all over the place.

In lockdown, I swam in the Thames a few times because I could cycle there, and they'd be swans going past. I noticed the absolute beauty of the surroundings.

In normal life you hurry past and think 'there's a swan' instead of noticing the magic of how a swan can just glide down the river. Is so noticeable. A kind of true mindfulness happening.'

Dealing with the well-meaning critics

Let's widen the focus now from our internal, reflective understanding of our confidence. How do external factors – especially the views of others – impact our confidence? And how do we deal with it?



Imagine this. Everyone has an internal management committee. Most of us unconsciously run our decisions past a number of influential characters in our lives. We consider what they might think about our decisions.

The most powerful characters in our lives can become introjects. Remember, introjection is a process in which we unconsciously incorporate aspects of our external reality into our own attitudes, values, and qualities.

If we are not careful, we then act out our own lives according to others' views, values, and beliefs, rather than properly determining our own.

Who is on your committee? For some, our fathers or mothers may dominate. For others, our partners, siblings, bosses, neighbours, or even the family pet are present.

Importantly, this inner cast of characters includes aspects of ourselves too. Our inner critic, Our risk-averse self, Our internal superwoman/man, Our deeply ambitious selves too. What aspects of you are on your committee?

Our internal management committee can create huge conflicts. When opinions and loyalties differ, who do we listen to? This conflict can tear us apart. It can result in paralysis. It can be responsible for us making bad decisions. Who do we please? The obvious answer is that you must please yourself first. You are, after all, in charge of your own life. Should we worry about what others think?

We are all born with a seed of something special within us – a seed of honest potential – that, if allowed to bear fruit, lets us forge a meaningful pathway in life and feel we are being true to ourselves. All too often, a well-meaning person of importance – a parent, spouse, sibling, teacher – questions our choice. We get knocked off course. We adopt someone else’s notion of who we might become, and we end up not doing what we were put on this planet to do.

If we manage to set off down the right route, we are often hounded by well-intentioned critics. Why don’t you get a proper job? Isn’t that just a hobby? Why don’t you train as a lawyer? Why don’t you marry a lawyer? And if we get diverted, we feel at odds with the path we find ourselves on because we know it’s not our true calling. It’s no accident that people often reconfront their thwarted creativity later, as a mid-life career change or a plausible retirement decision.

Here’s an example from my own life. I wrote a lot of poetry in my teens. I had hardback notebooks full of it. I left the books at home when I went to college. I arrived home at half term to discover that my father had read them all – and marked them out of ten in red pen in the top right-hand corner.

It was a long time before I picked up a pen to write creatively again.

A defining moment. An authority figure. High emotion, puzzlement, and discombobulation. These are the things that create stubborn beliefs. I can't write. I can't draw. I'll never be any good.

Remembering the moment, rethinking what was going on and getting support when we need it can liberate us from those beliefs. A fair number of the people I coach are troubled by similar stories. You don't need to remain stuck with those narratives.

Jungian psychology explains this through the notion of a shadow life, things within us that get internalised, repressed, un-lived and unrealised. But these things can re-emerge into consciousness as we get older and wiser, creating turbulence not just for the individual but for those around them too. It's vital to be yourself, not what others think you should be. It's also important not to allow others to infect you with their 'impossibility' mindset. It may sound cynical, but I think that many critics – even the well-meaning ones – speak from their own thwarted ambitions.

Does any of this resonate with you in some way?
Has your progress been impeded by others?

Or do you recognise the protective ‘parent’ behaviour in yourself?

The first bit of progress I think comes in simply recognising that these issues can affect you in some way. The next comes from figuring out what, if anything, you need to do about it.

Some simply recognise, shrug their shoulders, and move on. Some seek out positive thinkers – radiators, I call them – and they benefit from the mutual encouragement, support and accountability that comes from sharing plans and ambitions with others in a similar process of change.

Some get stuck, and the stuckness is a source of real discomfort. Symptoms include a sense of not being true to oneself, of being out of step, of wading through treacle. And sometimes this discomfort provides the motivation for getting unstuck and making progress.

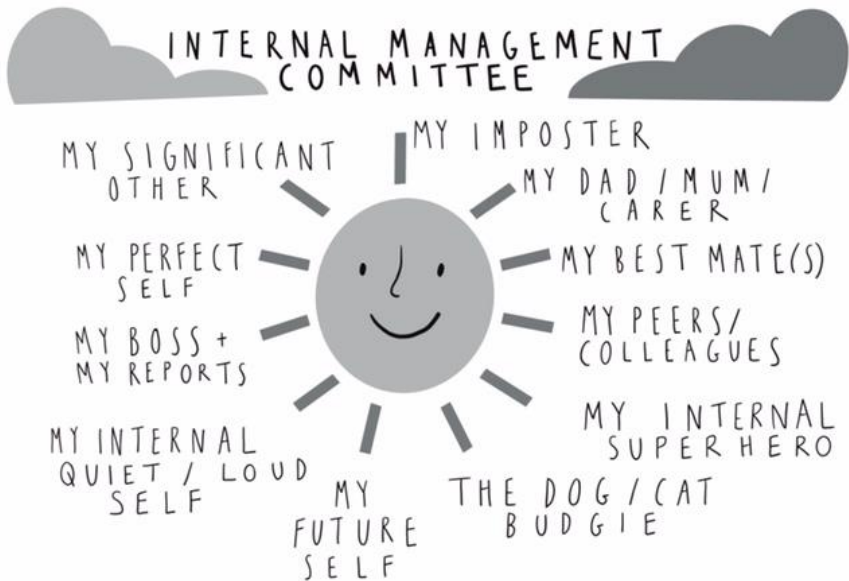
Real energy and motivation come when your goals, your values and what you do with your life are all aligned. Your individuality and unique creativity need to be celebrated, practised, unleashed. It doesn’t matter if you are 7 or 70 – if it’s in you, let it out. Whatever happens, don’t let it be someone else’s thoughtless but well-intentioned words that

stop you or put a brake on your practising your craft to the best of your abilities.

Can you ever plan for a perfectly aligned life? No. But we can keep doing the stuff that matters most to us, whatever that is. We can't do better than to hit the buffers still doing what we care about. The point is not to stall, or give up, or cop out, or surrender. It's not about volume. It's about frequency. It's about showing up.

Exercise: Who's on your internal committee?

Different people approach this exercise in different ways, so don't worry if you feel like you want to adapt the instructions.



Grab a sheet of paper and some pens – big enough to make a drawing or mind map on – and draw a figure or write a word that represents you in the middle of the paper. It might even end up looking like the illustration above.

Then, step by step, add all the characters that seem to have an influence when you're making decisions. Some of these may be real people: parents, siblings, children, colleagues, friends. One or two of them might be pets or dependent creatures. (I had a beautiful black Burmese cat called Maus. He used to come and sit on my hands while I was working at the keyboard. He definitely had an influence when I was thinking about taking a holiday, but I loved him deeply. If you have a pet, you'll know exactly what I mean.)

Some characters may be bits of you that seem to have a life of their own: the persistent procrastinator, the perfectionist, or maybe the internal superwoman or superman who expects far too much of you.

Map out all the characters you imagine. Consider each one in turn. How important are they to you? Do they have too much or too little say in what you do? Do any of them stop you doing things or being yourself? Do any of them keep you quiet?

Now think about something in your life you want to change. It can be anything, big or small. And now imagine each character has a volume or brightness control that you can adjust.

For example, even though he died many years ago, my dad is a powerful character in my life. He is still my 'risk assessor' – he'd lived through the war years and was highly risk-averse. Sometimes he tries to stop me taking risks. If I feel his influence is too great, I imagine turning down the volume control and mentally saying, "Thanks Dad, but I don't need your advice today." Then I can go ahead and do what it was that I wanted to do. The cool thing is, sometimes his influence is exactly what I need. Then I can choose to leave the volume control alone.

- Whose volume do you turn down? And why?
- Whose volume or brightness do you leave alone? And why?
- Do you turn anyone up? Why?
- Take some time to do this exercise and notice what your responses tell you.

BOOSTING QUIET RESILIENCE

Moments and periods of stress are inevitable. And we need some stress in our lives. Without stress, we don't know when to remove ourselves from danger. We can't perform to the best of our abilities. We may not notice when our life is out of alignment. Stress works for us. But once that working stress becomes a persistent, ongoing experience, we're in trouble.

That's because chronic, ongoing stress can turn into toxic stress, which is where substances like adrenaline and cortisol flood our systems and do all sorts of crazy things to us. Not least, chronic stress knocks out our immune system and leaves us open to illness. It's worth taking a few moments to get our heads around the science of this.

Understanding your stress response

Mainstream view

When you experience a stressful event, an area of the brain involved in emotional processing called your amygdala sends a signal to another area called your hypothalamus. The hypothalamus communicates with the rest of your body through the autonomic nervous system, which controls

breathing, blood pressure, heartbeat, and the airways in your lungs.

The autonomic nervous system has two components: the sympathetic nervous system and the parasympathetic nervous system. The sympathetic nervous system energises us. It provides the body with a burst of energy so that it can respond to perceived dangers. The parasympathetic nervous system relaxes. It promotes the 'rest and digest' response that calms the body down after the danger has passed.

After the amygdala sends a distress signal, your adrenal glands pump adrenaline into the bloodstream. Your heart beats faster than normal, pushing blood to the muscles, heart, and other vital organs. Your pulse rate and blood pressure go up. You start to breathe more rapidly. Your lungs start taking in more oxygen with each breath. This extra oxygen goes to the brain, increasing alertness. Your senses momentarily become sharper. Meanwhile, adrenaline triggers the release of nutrients which flood into the bloodstream, supplying energy to all parts of the body.

All these changes happen so quickly that we're not aware of them. In fact, the wiring is so efficient that the amygdala and hypothalamus start this cascade

even before your brain has had a chance to fully process what is happening. That's why people can get out of the way of danger even before they are fully aware of what is happening.

If your brain continues to perceive danger, your adrenal glands stimulate the production of cortisol. This keeps your system revved up and on high alert. When things calm down, your cortisol levels fall. The parasympathetic nervous system brings you back into balance and dampens down the stress response.

Toxic stress develops when the perceived threat doesn't diminish, and cortisol levels remain high for long periods of time. Elevated cortisol levels are associated with poorer cognitive functioning, affecting your short-term memory, decision-making, spatial memory, and processing speed. Over longer periods, elevated cortisol levels are associated with suppression of the immune system and poor long-term health outcomes.

However, the most recent research from neuroscience puts a different lens on this.

The emerging view from neuroscience

Whilst the traditional model is a useful way of understanding what's going on, the reality is much more complex. Your brain predicts and creates your experience of life in the moment, taking into account the current context you are in and all of your past experiences, plus the sensory information it is constantly sieving through. Your brain's involvement in those predictions and adjustments is not linear at all.

Your amygdala not just triggered by fear – it can be other things, such as disgust. Also, stress responses can be initiated from other parts of the brain.

To remain truly healthy and creative, we need to take some time to liberate ourselves from any aspects of chronic, ongoing stress.

In the following section I offer ideas for reducing stress levels and explain some of the neuroscience that underpins them. Simple but effective, the following techniques are some of the most powerful things we can do to keep ourselves clear and calm.

Staying in a good state

Neuroscientists have identified two psychological zones that shine a light on our experience of stress. Here's an overview of what they both mean for us.

Negative emotional attractors (NEAs)

Think about this. When you zone out, where do you go? Do you feel a sense of overwhelm? Or boredom? Or anxiety? Or the urge "I don't want to be here"? And what triggers this state for you?

The NEA is characterised by our experience of life's problems, pessimism, expectations, fear, negativity, 'shoulds' and 'must dos', externally imposed performance plans, things we find dissonant or annoying. As you can see, our perception can hold us in this state. But many of these experiences also come into our lives through external pressures such as other people's expectations and behaviours.

If the pressures that put us in the NEA state remain in place over time, we can find ourselves in a bad place. By their very nature these pressures can trigger extreme stress and raise our cortisol levels, which, if allowed to run riot in our system, can traumatise us.

Positive emotional attractors (PEAs)

Now think about the opposite – the positive stuff. Possibilities, dreams, optimism, hope, compassion. Working to our strengths. Getting excited about new things. Learning skills we want to get good at. Being creative. Thinking freely. Doing things which resonate within our relationships, friendship groups and communities. Breathing deeply, laughing, living our ideal life.

All of these characterise the PEA, the desired or ideal state we are intrinsically motivated to find and remain in, if we possibly can. Within this state, our system begins to be modified by hormones like oxytocin and vasopressin, which allow us to feel good.

We can create and maintain this positive state by doing some incredibly simple things: being kind, walking, helping others, hugging someone, stroking a pet, smiling, being in nature, meditating. Research is now supporting the simple, positive thoughts and actions that Buddhists and hippies have been telling us about for years.

The next step is to use a grounding technique to interrupt the lightning. An easy technique is to learn to pause momentarily – the equivalent of counting to ten – before doing anything at all. I'm going to offer you three more techniques to practise. Which you choose might depend on where you are when the 'whoosh' happens.

Deliberately notice things

If the situation allows, start to notice stuff: three things you can see, three things you can hear, three things you can touch. This noticing is a way of distracting yourself. Look out a window if you can. Breathe. And simply notice the detail of what is going on around you. Count pigeons. Notice leaves blowing around.

Use your senses

Lay your palms flat on a tabletop. Notice the temperature difference. Hold the metal frame of a chair – same thing. Or keep a bottle of icy cold water on your desk – not to drink, but to grab hold of if you feel stress levels rising.

Push the soles of your feet more firmly onto the floor. Grip your knees between your finger and thumb. Have a favourite pebble or crystal handy.

I'm a great believer in having a significant object close by – one that has a strong link to a positive or pleasurable experience.

Read about acupuncture and find the pressure points that help you settle. Use those points. Interestingly, you may find that the points that work for you will be different from the ones that work for someone else. Put time into figuring out what works for you. Your investment will pay off.

Use your tongue to calm your mind

When you think, your tongue makes microscopic movements that connect with the words in your head, as if you are saying them out loud. And, because there is a connection between your tongue and your internal chatter, you can create a reverse feedback loop to still your thoughts.

Place the tip of your tongue gently behind your upper teeth. Don't press too hard. Just focus on the gentle sensation of tongue against teeth. Breathe rhythmically whilst doing this. You may notice your chatter quieten down.

These are the techniques that I regularly use and recommend. There are many more to be found – an internet search for grounding techniques will bring

up many more choices. Pick a few that appeal to you and, more importantly, work for you.

Breathing

And breathe!

We've all heard it. But we maybe don't know how profoundly the way we breathe can affect our wellbeing. Why? Because we breathe without noticing. But stress can impact how we breathe, even to the point that we sometimes unconsciously hold our breath, or our breathing becomes shallow, and we don't get enough oxygen into our system.

Becoming aware of our breathing is such a simple way to regain control and get back into rest and digest mode. All it requires is some practice to get it right, and a small effort to incorporate it into our daily routine, and we soon have another highly effective strategy for calming ourselves.

Intentional breathing

Once the stress hormones kick in, it can be difficult to wrangle our thoughts successfully. So, we need then to tackle the stress first. Breathing is particularly useful. By redirecting our thinking to some other part of our body, we focus our attention

away from our thoughts. Thinking about our breathing can be a really powerful intervention that becomes second nature with practice.

Intentional breathing is just that – intentionally breathing in a rhythmic way so we can become calm and clear. What’s been good for Buddhist monks for millennia might just be good for us. It’s also used by special forces in high-intensity operations – and they simply wouldn’t use it if it didn’t work.

Here’s an extra tip. Breathing can either energise or relax us – and we need to make a choice. We can do so by selecting which part of the breath to focus on. Focus on the inbreath to energise. Focus on the outbreath to relax. Prioritise by staying longer in either your inbreath or outbreath.

3, 5, 7 breathing

OK, here we go. This is the special forces technique. Nothing difficult about this. Find a place where you won’t be interrupted for a while, where you can sit or lie comfortably. Turn off devices and notifications. Move around until you feel your posture is as straight as it can be while still relaxed. Untangle any crossed arms or ankles. If you can, let

your arms fall by your side rather than resting on your body.

Take a few slow breaths. And with each breath increase the volume of air you take in. But don't overdo it. This won't work if you end up feeling overinflated.

Next, get used to holding your inbreath for a while – a few seconds – without tightening up at the same time. It's not like holding your breath when you are curing hiccups. Stay loose.

Once you've got the hang of that, you can start the 3, 5, 7 routine. Here's how it goes.

Breathe into your lungs and belly within the count of 3 – a comfortably deep inbreath.

Hold for 5 while staying as loose as you can.

Then breathe out slowly for a count of 7. It's the outbreath that creates the reset.

And the last instruction is this. While you breathe out, touch the back of your upper front teeth with the tip of your tongue. This helps moderate and smooth your outbreath.

Box breathing

Another useful routine is 'box breathing'. And it's simple.

Inbreath for 4, hold for 4, outbreath for 4, hold for 4, and repeat. Again, hold gently.

If you can learn to do this a few times in succession, you can use it to calm yourself pretty much anywhere. If you incorporate it into your daily routine, even when you don't feel stressed, it will help reset your overall stress levels.

A few rounds before sleep, or to help you get to sleep, maybe? Then again for a few minutes before you get out of bed in the morning. Eventually you'll find yourself using it instinctively when you feel the whoosh of the stress response kicking in.

A view from a Breath Expert

This contribution is from Sorrel Roberts, Breath Coach.

‘How you breathe is literally how you are.

Those who don’t have enough time and feel rushed, tend to be those that breathe the fastest. Breathing slowly can cause people to disassociate and drift off into non-conscious areas of a slight sub-hibernative state.

Emotions and feelings are bi-directional, and memory and fear are encoded by how we take in our breath, and whether we breathe through the nose or the mouth. One way to coach people to feel and think better, is to teach people how they can breathe their way to a flow state, a calmness, and energised and optimised brain, coherent in its regulation and rhythms with the heart and the gut too.

Coherent breathing is quite simply a practice of breathing at a rate of 6 seconds in and 6 seconds out, this is done exclusively through the nose for all of the many health benefits that that brings. This breath brings heart, lung, and blood circulation into a state of coherence.

In my practice, and sharing this with others, I use a clicker-ticker to accompany the breath (more accurately a digital metronome). A sound that could be considered marginally irritating, it is designed to get and keep your attention. However, there is magic in it. It allows a suspension of internal chatter and keeps a focus on task – much like knitting only less tricky!

A curious and extraordinary thing is that this breathing pattern appears to feature across a wide range of religious and spiritual traditions. James Nestor, the author of a great book on the topic entitled *Breath* found that all of these prayer cycles corresponded to coherent breath.

- Buddhist chant - Om Mani Padme Hum
- Jainism and other traditions - Om
- Catholic prayer cycle – Ave Maria
- Also found in Hindu, Taoist, and Native American prayers

So, whatever your religious or spiritual beliefs, if you are breathing at the 6:6 rate you are bringing benefit to mind, body, and soul.'

Managing our thinking

Our ability to think is a double-edged sword. As a tool for creativity and problem-solving, thinking is a wonderful ability indeed. But when our thinking takes a negative turn, or persistent thought patterns become destructive rumination, our happiness and wellbeing can take a nosedive.

The saving grace is somewhat paradoxical. We can neutralise our negative thinking courtesy of our ability to think about our thoughts.

Once we develop the skill of thinking about thinking, we can bring our rumination under control, and we can get a bit better at managing where to place our attention.

We place our attention on specific thoughts every day. For example, we think about what we might have for lunch, and then make a decision related to that thought, and then act on it. Second nature. Problem solved.

When our sleep gets disturbed and we wake up with troublesome or upsetting thoughts, we're not quite so well prepared. But we can be if we practise our response. We can utilise something called cognitive defusion. This is about noticing our

thoughts as just thoughts. Separating them from our experiences and feelings. Letting them come and go, rather than holding on to them or getting caught up in them. Here's how:

Letting our thoughts pass on by

What happens when we watch something floating down a river? We notice it, we see it bobbing on by, we watch as it disappears downstream. We can do the same with a thought. We can identify it and let it pass by and flow away down our thought stream. We all have this ability to notice and process our thoughts in this gentle way.

Have you ever been to a sushi restaurant? Often the kitchen is central to the restaurant. And it's surrounded by countertops and tables that face inwards so you can observe the chefs as they prepare the food. In some restaurants, between you and the kitchen, there's a continuous conveyor belt that goes all the way around the restaurant. On the conveyor belt, there are little plastic pots of very tempting food with transparent lids, so you can see exactly what's in them.

And they flow past you continuously.

You have the option, if you like what you see, to pick a pot or two off the conveyor and put them on the table in front of you. Or you can simply leave them on the conveyor to continue on their way around. They may, or may not, come back again.

The same thing may pass you a few minutes later, and again, and again. We can begin to use this way of visualising things to create a metaphor for the way we make decisions as to what to do with our intrusive thoughts.

This mental picture is a great way to think about how we deal with our thoughts. If a thought appears that we want or need to deal with, we have a choice to take it off the conveyor belt. If not, we have the choice to leave it on and let it pass by. And, even if it comes round again, we still have the choice.

But what about when the conveyor belt switches on in the middle of the night? If we wake up and something's troubling us, rather than focusing straight in on it – taking it off the conveyor belt – we can be conscious of what's happening. We can ask ourselves the question, “Do I want to do that thinking thing or not right now? Do I want to focus on that particular thought again? Or do I want to leave it and let it pass by?”

And if it comes back, we don't have to grapple with it. Not now, not at this exact moment. We can let it go around again. And we can become more skilled at deciding whether we're going to deal with that thought right now or pick it up later.

If it's intrusive, we can always switch the light on and make a note, "I'm going to deal with that troubling thing in the morning or at the very next opportunity, but I'm not going to let it keep me awake."

It's interesting, isn't it, our ability to think about thinking. We can actually think about thinking about thinking and it can all get a bit meta. But the more skilled we get at noticing, "Oh, I'm doing that thinking thing again," the more we can become practised in reducing the amount of rumination. We can let more of the troubling and recurrent internal rambling pass on by.

Peace, love, joy, understanding – these are hard to find when we're contemplating the troubles of the past or fretting about an uncertain future. If we can create a point of stillness in our mind, we'll start noticing them in the cracks and crevices of the present moment. And when they appear, we'll realise they have been right here in front of us all the time.

Setting boundaries

When you are a quiet person, it's easy to get caught up in the slipstream of other people's wild energy and end up in places you didn't really want to go, doing things you didn't really want to do. You then have the embarrassing problem of excusing yourself and crawling away to a darkened room to recover. Sound familiar?

Boundary Dilemmas

- You say yes to stuff because you don't want to disappoint others, or you fear others will think less of you if you say no or ask for something different.
- You have a chameleon identity – you flex how you are according to what you think others want you to be. Instead, what would happen if you hold true to your own ideas and values.
- You feel that asking for help is a sign of weakness and you avoid it. You need to recognise that asking for help is entirely OK and you can ask for help when you need it.
- You take on other's problems as your own, rather than being clear about when a problem

is really yours and when it truly belongs to the other person.

- You allow others to define your limits in order to please them, rather than defining and respecting your own limits.
- You feel responsible for other people's happiness and allow that to define your relationships, rather than being responsible for your own happiness. Other people's happiness is their own responsibility.

There are many other examples. The main point to notice what's happening in respect of your boundaries and work to reset them, so they work in your favour.

There are a couple of ways we can deal with this:

- Reactively – to decide what to do, on the spot, when you get an invitation for something you are unsure about.
- Proactively – to think ahead about what you want more of in your life, seek out situations that you'll enjoy, and be ready to turn things down.

It's really important not to go into battle with your quiet nature over this one. It's much easier, in the long run, to set some boundaries so that you end up in the right environment. Negotiate. When something comes up, ask for time to think.

Think about how to respond or behave differently. Make a proactive choice to let your friends, family and colleagues know about quiet preferences. Ask if they will adjust their plans – go out to quieter places from time to time, join you in your preferred activities now and again. Strike a balance with them.

When you do find yourself out and about, make some preparations for social conversation. Take a discussion topic with you. Think about things you'd like to know more about from your friends. Have some interesting questions up your sleeve. Be a great listener!

Make a proactive choice to prioritise peace, quiet, meditation, mindfulness. Whatever works for you. Enjoy guilt-free quiet time – you have a right to it!

Creating a buddy support system for yourself can help. Pick one or two people and explain this to them. Help them understand what works and doesn't work for you. Then ask them to challenge

and support you as you make proactive choices for things to be different for you.

ENGAGING YOUR QUIET VALUES



Values matter to all of us – whatever we do and whoever we are. And values are an especially valuable tool in the quiet person’s toolbox. Why? Because, in the absence of having the shouty energy or a willingness to be pushy in our approach, the act of communicating one’s values simply and accurately can create wonderful, valuable, and meaningful connections.

And quieter people tend to reflect more, and we often consider our values within our reflections.

Getting to know your values intimately creates a strength that can be used widely in life and work.

Where do our values come from?

Most people may have clarity on some basic values – family values or spiritual values maybe. But the truth is far fewer of us have done any significant work on figuring out exactly what our values are, why they really matter, or where we got them from.

We absorb values from a very early age – from our parents, relatives, and peers – without realising. Over time, we take them for granted and enact them almost without thinking.

We come into adulthood with a mishmash of values and beliefs. Some are extremely useful and provide us with joy, energy, and motivation. Others may be inappropriate, ill-considered, or just plain toxic.

We evolve complex ways of making moral and ethical judgements, often without noticing or benchmarking them in any way. These biases – often unconscious – can limit our own choices and impact the experiences and choices of others, especially in the workplace.

Sometimes we end up with a hotch-potch of competing or contradictory values. The values of the locker room versus the values of the living room if you like.

Contradictory values and beliefs can lead to dysfunctional behaviours. It's easy to end up feeling 'at odds' with oneself, doing and saying things under peer pressure which we would never have done according to our own moral compass.

Speaking from a bloke's perspective, it's hard to reach adulthood without picking up some toxic values along the way. The challenge is first to notice this, then re-imagine yourself with different values and changed behaviours. And men should encourage others to do the same.

I do recognise that this is easier said than done, especially when there's conflicting peer pressure to act like a 'real man' or a 'new man'. If that pressure is uncomfortable, it's a sure sign that you won't be happy unless you find a different way for yourself.

I grew up in Glasgow in the late 1960s. Boy, were there some awful things said and done back then. So, I know, from experience, it's possible to adopt new and better ways of being in the world.

Values are the things that really matter to us. And that's a choice. We can edit them, weed out redundant or toxic values, clean up our act.

Redundant values and beliefs hold us back. Think about it. Are the values you grew up with working for you now?

How do our values serve us?

Values provide us with our ethical map and moral compass. They can keep us on the straight and narrow.

They are our powerpacks. They give us the energy and drive to conceive of doing extraordinary things.

Values drive our behaviour and learning – they fuel our desire to gain the skills we need to do the things that matter to us.

Values inform our personal story. As we grow, we develop an internal values-based narrative. This can be positive and useful to us, or it can be toxic and get in our way.

However, conflicting values and beliefs can demotivate us, stop us in our tracks. If our values

are out of balance, our behaviours will be inconsistent.

Values can bind us together, but they can also tear us apart. At the point of writing, the world was experiencing huge rifts over approaches to dealing with covid and vaccinations – extreme disagreements over values are common and can drive conflict.

And our values can be manipulated by the media to appeal to our baser instincts, to polarise thinking. When we are pushed to extremes, we lose the warm, nuanced thinking in the middle – denying us access to conversations and connection.

Values can be a powerful, unifying force. A simple, clearly facilitated conversation around values – the ones we have in common and the ones we don't – will bring a group closer together with a stronger understanding and appreciation of each other's unique qualities. Without this discourse, we can remain stuck in superficial conversation, never really getting to grips with what's important to ourselves and each other.

Most of the human race has a whole heap of common values. It's the differences we often notice. Coming together and discussing values can help us

understand how to connect and work with others, even if their values are different from our own.

Making choices in our values

You wouldn't continue to use a computer without updating the software. If we don't revisit our values and beliefs from time to time – especially those we acquired early on in life – we are running on outdated software, making decisions, and reacting to things on the basis of unquestioned values, largely because we haven't consciously thought them through.

Values exercises based on lists or cards are a good starting point but only reveal half the story. Why? Confirmation bias means we choose words, phrases, cards that confirm what we like to think our values are. This may lead to an unreliable list – not the best foundation to work from.

Reflecting in depth on our values is a real eye-opener. It reveals just how many of the rules we operate by have been gathered up over the course of our lifetimes. We may not even be conscious of some of the most powerful stuff that drives our personal 'operating system', or who in our lives has influenced us most deeply.

A clear understanding of our own values enables us to move away from bending to peer pressure. It helps us notice the values we've absorbed unconsciously. It gives us the strength to avoid selling out to fit in. And being able to share our story – based on our values – is the foundation of our ability to form close bonds, influence others and create the relationships we need in order to thrive in life and work.

When people discover our values and tune in to them, a virtuous circle is created – a circle of values, empathy, trust, relationships, loyalty. Our friends, colleagues and customers bind to us, finding consistency and comfort in the values we share with them.


Exercise: What are your values?

If you struggle to think about and identify your own values, grab your notebook, and try these two simple exercises.


What floats your boat?

Grab a sheet of paper and write the following question at the top of the page: "What floats your boat?"

WHAT FLOATS YOUR BOAT?



- WHAT ARE THE THINGS THAT REALLY MATTER? ● _____
- WHAT ARE THE THINGS THAT REALLY MOTIVATE YOU? ● _____
- WHAT CAN'T YOU DO WITHOUT IN YOUR LIFE? ● _____
- WHAT DRIVES YOU? ● _____



Consider these things as you capture your thoughts:

- What really motivates you?
- What do you really connect with in life?
- What can't you do without?
- What do you love and hold dear?

Your answers will help you identify all the things, people and experiences that are really important to you – that's the point. Values are not just concepts. They are behaviours that you embody in your lived experience.

Identify a 'peak experience'

A peak experience is a moment where everything aligns. Our sense of being in the world is enhanced, and we feel things like warmth, intense satisfaction, feelings of flow, excitement, passion, spiritual connection, love.

For example, I love being by the sea. Being on the shore, listening to the sounds of waves and seabirds, feeling the sun (or rain!) and wind on my face, breathing in the smells of ozone and seaweed. Moving from doing to simply being in the moment. I experience it as a blend of quiet thoughts, physical

sensations, and emotions – a truly multisensory experience that joins me to the world on an essential level. I'm not a religious person, but in this moment, I connect powerfully with my sense of the spiritual.

1. What ranks as a 'peak experience' for you?

This first step is to pick a moment in time when you have had that kind of experience.

2. What does the experience tell you about what really matters to you?

This second step is to identify which of your values are being met in that moment.

3. How can you get more of these experiences in your life?

The final step is to find ways to create more experiences, more often, in which your sense of being and your values are this closely aligned.

Engaging with our values – head, heart, and gut!

Our values aren't the only factors that drive our choices and behaviour:

- Our values describe what matters most to us.
- Our beliefs are what we hold to be true.
- Our needs are the things we require to survive and thrive, food, warmth, shelter, friendships, and relationships.
- Our goals are the outcomes we decide to go for – the things we want to accomplish.

When our values, beliefs, needs, and goals are aligned, we are able to move forward sustainably, and in ways that support our emotional health and wellbeing.

We typically engage with our values in three ways:

- We think about our values: labelling them, making lists of words to describe them, defining what matters to us in terms of values, beliefs and needs.
- We enact our values: talking about them and acting them out in our relationships. We begin

to use them in the storytelling of our work and life.

- We embody our values: embracing them at head, heart, and gut level. Committing to them at a deeply emotional level. We feel our values and live them. At this level, values are a life force. You can see it in the passion and commitment of people who have embodied their values: emotionally intelligent leaders, gifted speakers, activists, connectors.

As we learn to engage more deeply with our values, the magic starts to happen...

We get to understand our internal values-based narrative – the stories we tell ourselves about our confidence, credibility, and capabilities.

We become clear about who we want to connect with and why. And we become more open to those connections.

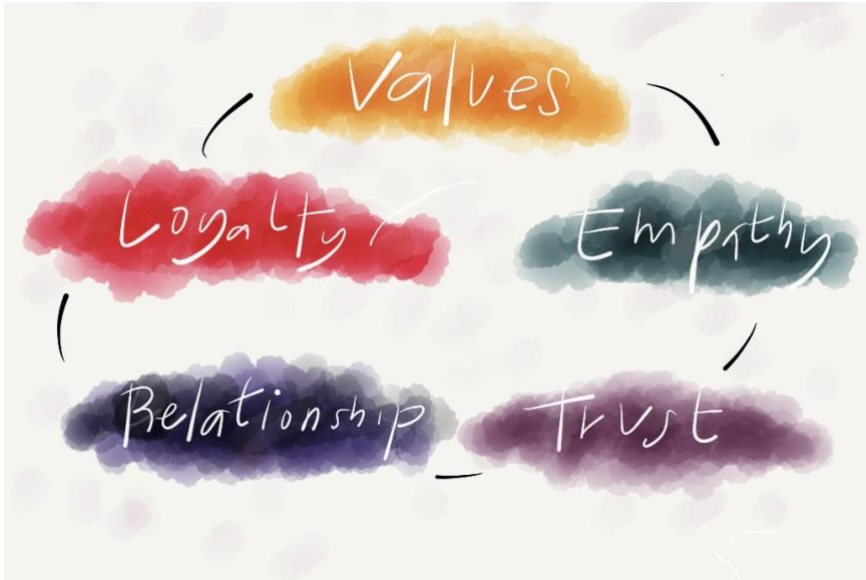
We begin to craft the stories we need to tell others to connect with them effectively. And we tell our stories with greater confidence because we believe them ourselves.

The virtuous circle of loyalty and trust

Shouting, badgering, trying to persuade by any means – fair or foul – are all failed strategies in my book. There really is only one path to building loyal and sustainable relationships, and that is by leading with your values, truthfully spoken.

How do we do this?

We need to create space for the conversations that allow others to test our integrity. And this often means getting out there and talking to people face to face. The neuroscience of storytelling tells us that the conversation – sharing and listening – is the single most effective way to connect with people and bond over common values.



Over time, we connect most powerfully with people who can see that they share some of our values. If they observe that we are honest, engaging, and consistent, genuine two-way empathy can take place. They will feel drawn towards us and us to them.

Trust now comes into play. And trust is strengthened when people hear a consistent message that demonstrates our values in action. People start to feel warmth and gain reassurance from what we say.

We now have a relationship. If we are careful and consistent in our actions, listen carefully and

continue the conversation – mindful of growing expectations – we generate loyalty. If our relationships are trusting and loyal, others will begin to spread the word and become our champions and ambassadors.

This creates a loyal audience and, by extension, a community. This is how we find our tribe.

These principles are at the heart of all the work that I do. You don't need to be loud, shouty or high-energy to be effective. Just listen carefully. Lead with your values. Demonstrate them in what you do and say. Your real tribe – those who share your core values – will be drawn towards you.

WORKING QUIETLY

“Build yourself a fortress of goodwill. Fill it with people who love what you do. Create a virtuous circle of loyalty and trust.”

In this section I offer a range of tools and ideas to help you share more of yourself and your work. It's a deliberately broad selection as I know you may be working in different ways: employed, self-employed or simply looking for advice on how to share your ideas more effectively with others.

You know the feeling... You may want to communicate more effectively at work, become more adventurous on social media, start a fabulous blog about something you are passionate about, give a talk. But your inner critic says it's just not going to happen. How do you overcome the fear and self-doubt that gets in the way?

Quiet people are prone to negative self-talk. And our critical inner voices can stop us in our tracks. There's a reason for that. In evolutionary terms, your inner critic is there to keep you safe, to stop you taking unnecessary risks. But putting yourself forward and 'staying safe' don't tend to go hand in hand.

Here's the good news – you can change all that.

Many of the quiet people I work with worry about sounding inauthentic or coming across as boastful and bragging. Other common fears include sounding cheesy, sharing too much or too little, trying too hard, over-selling – all the concerns that a thoughtful person might have when trying to get their message across.

Sometimes the stories we tell ourselves – about our confidence, our credibility, our place in the world – must meet up with the stories we need to tell others so we can contribute in a team, raise our profile or sell our work. That meeting place can be full of conflict, but it's also a place of tremendous opportunity.

When we're able to bring our beliefs, our values, and our stories into alignment, we become authentic and credible. Others see our expertise. Our confidence is boosted, and we connect with others much more effectively. Magical things happen. When these things are dissonant, it shows, and people are less trusting of our message.

Sharing your ideas



In a work environment, it's hard to gather all the courage you have and start talking in a team meeting. Suddenly you find everyone's eyes are focused on you. When you're great at your job, but feel overlooked and invisible, how can you increase your confidence? The danger is that you dry up or fumble your words.

Here's the first tool – a way to focus people's attention on your ideas and take their gaze away from you.

Prepare a simple document that summarises what you want to present to the group. This could be a mind map, a flowchart, or a simple bulleted list of

ideas. Make it visually appealing and keep the word count low.

Ask whoever is leading the meeting if they will add it to the agenda, that way it's not you trying to break into the flow of the meeting. Or enlist a more confident colleague to introduce the topic and hand over to you. Give everyone a copy and lead people through your ideas. Your document is your script, and it will keep you on track.

Let people know you're willing to talk about your ideas one-to-one afterwards. Your colleagues will appreciate the fact that you've given them something structured to think about. Your team leader will be very happy that you've spoken up.

Don't worry about being a bit wobbly at first. This technique works well and, over time, will help you build confidence and gain respect.

Exercise: What do you want to share?

Think about something you're working on right now. If you work in an organisation, this might be a project you've been given, an idea you want to suggest, an innovation you've developed or a change in process you want to propose. If you work independently, this might be a new product or service you want to test.

You can use this checklist of process steps to prepare for sharing your ideas and securing other people's support.

For each step, I suggest the quiet superpower that you may draw upon. Do these resonate for you? Perhaps you are using your superpowers in a different way?

At every step you can use your quiet thoughtfulness to think through:

- Your process – how you'll go about accomplishing each step.
- The success factors – how you'll know when you've fulfilled each step.

Step 1: Check your facts – identify WHAT needs doing

Your quiet superpower – conscientiousness.

Step 2: Connect to the higher goal – clarify WHY it needs doing

Your quiet superpower – your sense of purpose.

Step 3: Tune in to others – identify WHO to involve and HOW

Your quiet superpower – quiet empathy.

Step 4: Test your ideas – ask the WHAT IF... questions

Your quiet superpower – rigorous reality checking.

Step 5: Ask for help – work out WHAT you need and WHO can help

Your quiet superpower – tuning in to someone you trust.

Step 6: Make your contribution – GO FOR IT!

Your quiet superpower – trusting yourself.

Asking for input

Sometimes it's wise to get input early on when you're developing an idea. It may take a little courage to ask, but this consultation stage can help you anticipate pitfalls or fix early errors.

The tool I'm offering here is a useful formula for testing your ideas with others. It's based on my own experiences of designing and giving talks and workshops.

My goal is to help you avoid the bitter experience I've had, in the past, of spending ages, working in a darkened room, perfecting things but creating them 'blind' through lack of feedback. And then finding that my creation didn't quite land in the way I expected and maybe didn't work as well as it could have.

My formula now is simple:

- Don't overdevelop an idea too early.
- Put together the bare bones – just enough to explain to someone else.
- Put together any resources you need – but nothing too fancy.
- Find a testbed – someone who's willing to give you feedback or let you try your idea out.

When you're looking for a testbed or someone to ask for input, aim high. Don't test your idea with the local scout group or WI if that's not really your intended audience. Try to test your idea in the kind of setting you'd ideally like to deliver it to, once it's perfected.

You can save yourself a lot of time, effort, blood, sweat and tears, even money, by taking your bare bones idea, giving it a robust test, and gathering useful feedback and experience. And you end up with a much better result.

I've done this so many times, I'm absolutely convinced that it's the right way to go. I no longer work in a darkened room perfecting things. I'm much happier going forward with new ideas on the basis that I've tested them. I learn more and, in the end, everyone gets a better result.

Here's a real example:

I developed a workshop around pitching and presenting that I imagined would work well with graduate and postgraduate students in higher education settings.

I approached the design studio at a local university.

A willing lecturer agreed to provide a group of students. The students knew they were taking part in a test run, with the expectation that I would deliver the very best workshop I could for them in return for robust feedback. I knew I wanted testimonials from the students, feedback from the tutors, the chance to take some photographs and a bit of video, so I could come away from the experience with everything I needed to market the workshop more widely.

Testing my workshop this way gave me the opportunity to deliver it for real but without the pressure to get everything perfect. I got to iron out all the wrinkles, spot issues I wouldn't have anticipated, test my delivery, and understand what was going to work well for this kind of audience. It gave me everything I needed to go away and refine the workshop for next time.

Swapping anxiety for preparation

Every time we go into an unfamiliar situation, our anxiety levels increase. The more unknowns there are in play, the more discomfort we feel. If we're doing something special, or out of the ordinary, or there's a lot hanging on it, anxiety levels can go through the roof. The danger, of course, is that we freeze like a rabbit in the headlights, gabble

incoherently, or try to 'check out' unnoticed!
Sometimes, it might end up being a combination of all three...

There are ways to ease the anxiety by reducing the unknowns. Preparation, well in advance, is the key. And the preparation tool I'm offering here has four stages: checking the facts, picturing the situation, doing a mental rehearsal, and connecting to your higher goal.

Tour de France riders ride every inch of every stage well in advance of the race, usually with another rider who has ridden the route before. So, before the race starts, they know the twists and turns of the route, where the potholes and dangerous bends are, where they can safely speed up and where they need to take things slowly. What this does is free up a massive amount of brainpower. Come race day, they can focus their concentration on managing the physical effort of the race. They are not having to learn so much 'on the go'.

When we know we have a stressful event coming up, we have a choice. We can push it out of our minds. Or we can reduce our anxiety by taking the time to start preparing as far in advance as possible.

Here's the process I use to prepare for a speaking event in an unfamiliar venue. You can scale this routine up or down to suit your needs.

Checking the facts

As soon as my presentation is confirmed, I check the location and travel times. It may be a couple of months away, but checking the facts and details stops me panicking every time I think of it.

I email the organiser with a checklist of everything I need in terms of parking, power sockets, cables, adaptors, whether I can use my iPad to present or need to send the presentation in advance. I get a clear answer to as many questions as possible at this stage.

Picturing the situation

I find out as much as I can about the audience: how many, where they are coming from, whether it's a specialised audience or a public talk that is open to allcomers. This helps me visualise their interests and needs. Then I can start thinking about ways in which I might need to adapt the content.

I look at the venue or organisation website and try to glean as much information as possible about the

environment; I look for photos of the auditorium or seminar space. I try to get a feel for things and picture the surroundings I'll be working in.

I ask the host how they normally run things. I try to get a sense of whether they're an organised person or an 'it'll be all right on the night' kind of person. And I always ask to be let into the room at least an hour before the event starts to allow for technical hitches and compatibility problems.

Doing a mental rehearsal

Once I've gleaned all the information I can, I do a mental rehearsal. I find a quiet place, sit down, and imagine the event unfolding. I try to rehearse things in as much detail as possible. This allows me to spot any places where I've failed to think of something that might trip me up. If you have ever played on a flight simulator computer game, you'll know exactly what I mean. You can be the pilot, or you can switch into observer mode and watch yourself flying the plane. Either works.

On arrival, my tactic is always to get in the room as soon as possible. First, I want to troubleshoot any problems with the technology. For me, this is a big source of anxiety and I need to neutralise it as fast as possible. Second, I want to experience the space

from the audience's point of view. What are the sight lines like? What are the acoustics like? Will I really need a microphone?

I like to sit in a few different seats. This gives me a sense of how I might need to move around the room to be seen. It also lines me up to make eye contact and connect with everyone as quickly as possible.

Connecting to the higher goal

Finally, as the audience arrives, I try to acknowledge everyone in some small way, whatever is possible in the circumstances. This tiny bit of 'getting to know you' activity reduces the feelings of anxiety that come with being in a room full of strangers.

If it's up to 15 people, I'll try to say hello, shake hands and smile at as many of them as I can. With larger groups, connecting with just three or four can make a huge difference. If you have a few friendly faces dotted round the room, you can check in with them as you sweep your eye contact around the audience.

You're in good company

Visualisation and mental rehearsal are used universally. I mentioned Tour de France riders earlier. Heart surgeons, deep sea divers, pilots – people who expose themselves to tricky situations day in, day out – all use variations of these techniques. If it works for them, it's highly likely to work for you too. Try it. It may seem unfamiliar and uncomfortable to start with. But give it a chance. This tool may become a key part of your work routine.

Letting others see your light

As a quiet person, we need to find ways to make sure that the stories we tell ourselves are healthy for us and help us make connections with others. As purpose-driven individuals, we want to attract and connect with people who are ready and willing to connect with us. This should be our primary focus – to find those people who share at least some of our values. And then to let them make the choice to connect with us, or not, or not yet...

Putting ourselves forward – letting our light shine – can be more of a challenge for us quiet people. The tools I'm offering here can help you break this challenge down into bite-sized chunks.

Finding your tribe

So how can you, as a quiet person, connect with a community of people who love what you do? People who 'get' you, who understand your quiet talents, who value your approach. Colleagues who will become trusted teammates. Customers who will become loyal fans.

The answer is to let go of the pressure to be something you're not. To stop trying to 'sell' your ideas. To connect with your values and

demonstrate them through your actions, so the right people notice you and value you.

The earlier section 'Engaging your quiet values' will help with this. And storytelling can help you share more of yourself. We'll cover this a bit later.

Connecting beyond your tribe

How much should you reveal of yourself to others?

I'm often asked this question and there's no simple 'one size fits all' answer. Using our quiet empathy is our superpower here. Put yourself in the shoes of a manager, a colleague, or a customer. Think about what they need to know to understand and trust you. Think about what draws you to some people and not to others.

Your words transmit only a tiny part of the message others receive. The way we connect with others is a multi-sensory mosaic. It is everything from the smile on our face to our email signature. From the look and feel of our social media or website to the sound of our voice. We engage with each other in different ways, and we build trust when we sense consistency in the way others communicate who they are and what they're about.

We often forget the exact words that people use, but we always remember how they made us feel. Studies in neuroscience show us that emotions stimulate the production of neurotransmitters which, in turn, help us commit an experience to memory. And, as well as pleasing interactions, emotions can be triggered by beautiful images and evocative words or sounds. We can use all these approaches to strengthen our connections, help others understand our contributions and ensure our ideas take shape.

Taking your time

People build up their impression of us over time. But it's easy to feel pressure to make a rapid, memorable impact on others. Social media pushes this sense of urgency at us all the time.

And the good news is we all crave the nuance and a sense of involvement that doesn't deliver instant results. It takes time for people to build up enough of an impression of us to want to take the relationship further.

So, the suggestion I'm offering here is to remember three criteria that form the basis of strong relationships: know it, like it and trust it.

Here's an example of what these criteria mean for me. I'm often approached by clients who have been aware of my work for years. They've come across my articles, read my books, and watched my videos. Only then have they made the decision to pick up the phone or drop me a line. The magical thing is this. By taking their time to get to grips with who I am and what I do, we're able to work together in a way that's rewarding for me and really makes a difference for them.

We don't pass the 'know it, like it, trust it' criteria in short, easy steps. Think back to the earlier section on values – we can't skip any of the stages in the values > empathy > trust > relationship > loyalty cycle.

As quiet people, we're much more suited to creating subtle, valuable, nuanced relationships with colleagues, managers, or potential customers. Developing ideas slowly. Communicating them in bite-sized chunks. Showing one facet of ourselves at a time. Cementing trust through being consistent. These steadier, considered behaviours tend to come naturally to us. And they give people a chance to get a sense of how we might respond when they ask us a question. They give people a sense of our values. They help people create a true picture of who we are.

The relationships that are won slowly, subtly and in a trustworthy way are the ones that will last and sustain your work or your career.

Being yourself

In the era of humble bragging and virtue signalling, is modesty still worth having? Is it still valued? It turns out that it is, and in more important ways than we might imagine.

I was discussing values with a coaching colleague the other day. She reflected that she found modesty to be an unhelpful value in herself. She felt it got in her way when she needed to create content for her website.

That made me stop and think. Modesty isn't a word that comes up a lot in my line of work. It prompted me to do a bit of research to see how shining our light and modesty work together.

Most of us regard modesty as a culturally led value. Some cultures rank modesty highly, some enforce it, some regard it as a weakness. I feel that the word has dropped out of currency. We're losing the language to describe the immensely subtle behaviours that we associated with the term. The

noise and volume of modern communication is now masking the subtleties of meaning that were once practised in everyday life and passed down the generations – the art of communicating more by saying less.

Here's the good news. Some people are attracted to modest behaviour, including more modest communication styles. It turns out there are different types of 'sender' and 'receiver' who tune in to different styles of communication. If you are a quiet, modest sender, there are people out there like you who will detect your quiet message (despite the surrounding white noise) and receive it appropriately.

In getting all 'hot and bothered' about how we should communicate, we can end up sending very confusing signals indeed. Too often, quiet, unassuming types who hide their light under a bushel are told to 'fake it 'til they make it' or ridiculed for not joining in the scramble for people's attention. Perhaps we already know, instinctively, that the people who will really matter to us in the long run won't be attracted by that type of behaviour. They are scanning for messages on a different wavelength. Far better to dial down our effort and dial up our natural style and approach.

Earning authenticity

The word 'authenticity' comes from the Greek root 'authentikos' meaning 'original, genuine, principal.'

Humanistic psychologists say that authentic people possess common characteristics that show they are psychologically mature and fully functioning as human beings. Typically, they:

- are accepting of themselves and of other people
- have realistic perceptions of reality
- are thoughtful
- have a non-hostile sense of humour
- express their emotions freely and clearly
- are open to learning from their mistakes
- understand their motivations.

I don't know anyone who doesn't want to be authentic or for whom authenticity isn't an aspirational value. However, authenticity isn't something you can simply choose to have or claim for yourself. Authenticity, credibility, and expertise are bestowed on us when we display those attributes. We need to earn those labels.

When we bring our values and behaviours into alignment, we tend to be perceived as more

authentic. It's easier for people to connect with us. We meet the 'know it, like it and trust it' criteria. When our values and behaviours are dissonant, it shows, and people are less trusting of us.

So, how do we earn the badge of authenticity? It takes time because it comes from the consistency with which we serve others. People bestow authenticity, credibility, or expertise upon us in recognition of what we do for them.

However, there is much we can do to earn our credibility and authenticity:

- Speak honestly and from the heart – decide how much of ourselves we're prepared to share and stick to our boundaries.
- Use our own words – don't try to emulate the styles, techniques, or voice of others.
- Lead from our values – let others know what matters to us.
- Don't make false claims – be consistent and earn others' trust.

“Intellectual humility speaks to people’s willingness to reconsider their views, to avoid defensiveness when challenged, and to moderate their own need to appear ‘right.’ It is sensitive to counterevidence, realistic in outlook, strives for accuracy, shows little concern for self-importance, and is corrective of the natural tendency to strongly prioritize one’s own needs.” – John Templeton Foundation

Telling your story

We are all storytellers now. Social media fuels our desire to share stories about our holidays, our hobbies, our interests, and our work. And we’re constantly encouraged to view other people’s stories. But it can feel very fast-paced and superficial. We click the link to someone’s social media stream or website out of curiosity. If we’re to stay more than a few seconds, we need to find something pretty quickly that captures our interest.

And think about this. Isn’t it just obvious when someone is posting because they feel they ought to, rather than to share an idea that’s inspired them? If we share our stories because we feel we ought to, it really shows. It leaks out. Others notice. Far better to communicate what we really believe in, even if we post less frequently and in fewer places.

Then, we look like we really mean what we say, and our energy and commitment shine through.

There's an art, science, and psychology to personal storytelling. Our stories can bind us together or drive us apart. And, as quiet people, we already know that the stories we tell ourselves can fuel our success or hold us back. As colleagues and employees, our stories are often the experiences we share with others in our team. As self-employed workers, we're likely to look for ways to share our story with potential customers to build trust and earn authenticity, credibility, and expertise in their eyes.

So, as quiet people, we need to find ways to tell our stories that help us really shine. For some of us, this may be the written word. For others, it may be presenting things visually, or creating podcasts, or making video.

Exercise: How can you tell your story?

Think about these questions and answer honestly. Make a note of your responses. You may learn more about how you want to shine your light.

- **Do you get a buzz from speaking to people in person?** It doesn't matter whether this is one-to-one or one-to-many. This is a skill that we can all develop in our own way. It's also the number one 'connector' of people. Your listeners are much more likely to connect with your story if they are in the same room.
- **What about video?** This is the number two connector and that's exactly why all the social media companies are promoting their 'story' features. It doesn't necessarily mean talking directly to your camera. You could narrate a video that captures what you do, shows your work in progress, or shares your ideas, products, or services. You just need to make sure that it has a touch of you in it.
- **Are you good with spoken word?** If so, creating an audio podcast can be really engaging. And the benefit for a quiet person is that you can record a podcast while sitting in

a peaceful place on your own. No need to expose yourself in real time.

- **Are you good with written word?** A well-written, well-illustrated blog post can be a powerful thing. If you get excited about writing, and then watching as other people like and share your content, this could be the approach for you. And this is often the first step someone takes towards writing their book...

Your story is so much more than words. A story is a multifaceted thing. We can have the biggest impact on others when we touch all five senses and engage with every learning preference. I'll share more about this later.

Choosing your platform

Many quiet people really struggle with the idea of self-promotion. Why would we choose to put ourselves in the spotlight? And many of us struggle to find the right approach or platforms to increase our visibility.

Social media, blogs, podcasts, online learning systems... The number of platforms out there is bewildering. And there's a widely promoted belief

(driven by people who want our money) that we should be well connected across a wide range of platforms. But unless we have a lot of time and a very high degree of skill, or the money to outsource the problem, this can be a major cause of stress and confusion.

If you decide to share your story to promote your work, your choice of platform will be driven by what you need to achieve. For example, if you have a conventional career, or work in a people-focused job, LinkedIn may be all you need. If you run your own business, you might want to add Twitter into the mix. And maybe Instagram, especially if your work is creative or visual in any way.

The first step to choosing the right platform – or platforms – for you is to think about the connections you want to make and why. Are you self-employed and looking for work? Are you wanting to change jobs? Are you starting your career? Or looking for a change in career?

Each platform will require a different approach and deliver different results. You may need to do a bit of testing to decide where to focus your time and effort.

Think about the way you interact with the platforms you use most:

- Are there any where you feel more energetic and alive?
- On which one(s) do you feel most connected with others?
- Are there any that absorb you to the point that you are unaware of time passing whilst you are working with them?
- If so, what is it you enjoy about working in that place?

Take a moment to figure out your honest answers to these questions. Why is this self-knowledge so important? The answers provide the clues that will help you select the right place to share what you do best.

Igniting the spark in others

The perfect story – on the perfect platform – would allow your audience to see, hear, smell, touch and taste the essence of your work. That’s hard to do. So how can we get close to delivering that experience?

Think about the way you shop. Some of us like to hold things up to the light. Some of us like to pick things up and turn them round in our hands. Others like to feel the weight and textures of things. The smell of a product may be paramount to some. The colour and surface decoration more important to others.

We all select the things that we surround ourselves with in different ways. Some like to browse online. Others prefer the hustle and bustle of the department store. Some won’t even begin the buying process until they have consulted with their friends.

Imagine this. You are browsing a website and want to find out more about the person behind the product or idea you are exploring. You click on the ‘About Me’ page. There is no image of the person you are trying to connect with. You look for a story

and find a CV or list of achievements, but nothing personal. What do you feel? What do you do?

You go to another website. You click on the ‘About Me’ page. There are a few nice images that show the person in a meaningful setting. Or, better still, a video with a warm, chatty message that feels like it’s spoken to you personally. There may be a few endorsements or recommendations on the page. The text reveals a few interesting facts about the person, a glimpse of their values in action, and an invitation to get in touch and find out more. What do you feel? What do you do?

The good news is that your storytelling doesn’t rely on you being a fabulous writer. You don’t have to be seen on video – at least not until you are ready. And you don’t have to reveal things that are private or sensitive in any way.

And I’m prepared to bet that you already have many of the resources you need to be an effective storyteller. Very few people need to start this process from scratch. You may need to dig around, remember great things you’ve done, and give yourself credit for your past experience. We all have material to draw on, and this exercise will help you identify what you’ve already got.

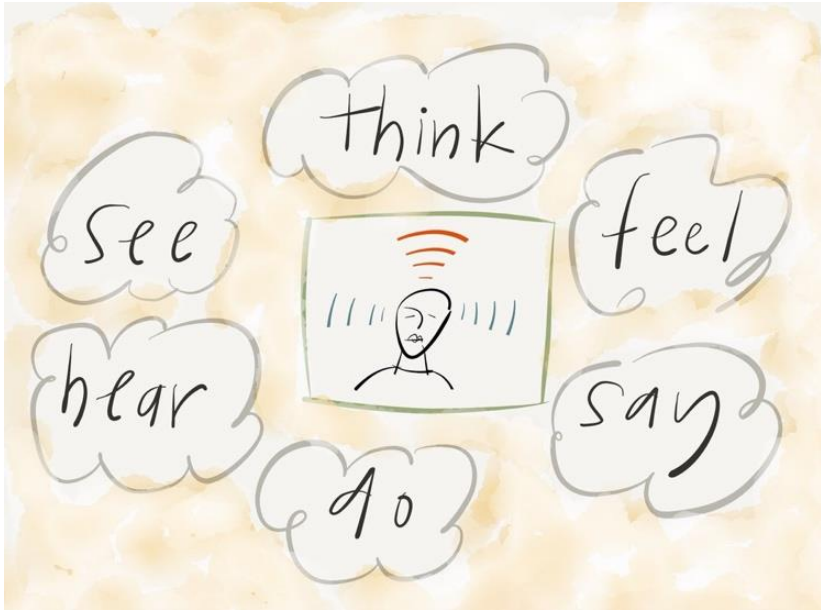
Exercise: How can you ignite the spark?

This exercise helps you carry out an audit of your storytelling materials and it can be done in two stages.

First, you carry out the audit to establish what you've already got. Then you do it again through an aspirational lens to work out what you need to add or create to move from basic storytelling to something more sophisticated.

The illustration reinterprets a well-known tool called the customer empathy map. It will help you reflect on the areas of your life and work that you feel OK about presenting to the world. And it will alert you to potential gaps. Filling the gaps may encourage you into the stretch zone, but you can deal with that in easy steps. I'll show you how.

First, study the image. Move round it in a clockwise direction. Use each heading to do a quick audit of your storytelling 'assets' in each area.



Think

What can you share that will make people think?

- engaging, thought-provoking content
- a written statement or proposal
- a topical point of view
- evidence of what you do
- useful articles or videos you have found, offered in an organised way
- blog posts
- articles on LinkedIn or Twitter
- infographics – a blend of words and pictures

Feel

What can you share that connects on an emotional level?

- content that shows what matters to you – that reveals your values
- pictures (worth a thousand words, and all that...)
- stories of problems you've encountered and overcome
- humour

Say

What can you share that will answer people's questions about your work?

- case studies
- facts and figures
- interesting quotes
- testimonials from colleagues or customers
- product information that helps people choose to buy
- information that demonstrates your ethical behaviour, careful sourcing, or sensitive thinking

Remember: Other people's opinions of what you do are more credible to others than your own opinion.

Do

Some people just love to click!

- clickable links to other relevant content
- downloadable brochures or guides
- links to videos or podcasts
- quizzes

Hear

What can you share that will let others hear your tone of voice?

- you talking
- interviews – audio or video
- you being interviewed or interviewing others
- links to other related videos or podcasts
- radio or TV appearances

See

What can you share that will make people feel they've met you?

- a photo of you, professionally taken

- candid photos of you at work
- your work in progress – a glimpse behind the curtains
- photos of happy clients if they're willing to share them
- great product photos

Remember: Visual content must be really great quality and high-resolution.

Note: You don't need all of these. One or two from each section is a great start. And you won't use all of them. Not all at once anyway. The purpose of this exercise is to help you build your personal archive of storytelling materials.

Once you've audited what you currently have, work through each section again. This time, identify the storytelling 'assets' you want to start gathering and using from now on. Build up your collection.

Tips for promoting yourself

Making your contribution, and letting others know about it, doesn't mean you have to be loud, brash, or highly visible. Many of us do our best work in quiet solitude where we can think, experiment, test or create. We create work of unimaginable power and beauty. And that's what counts.

How can we offer our contribution to others in the most meaningful way? Here are a few 'ninja' tips, drawn from my own experience, that you may find useful, especially if you need to promote your work professionally.

Don't throw anything out

You never know when you might need that old photo of you doing that thing that has just become relevant again.

For a number of years, I performed a one-man circus show in schools. I worked with the kids to boost their confidence by sharing simple physical skills with them. But in my 30s I became embarrassed by that fact. It didn't seem to fit with my image of myself anymore. So, I tore up most of the photos.

Looking back, learning to perform was pivotal in me getting out there as a shy introvert. I couldn't do what I do now without that experience.

I'd love to have those photos back again.

Tell others what you want

This is a true story. A couple of years ago, I arranged to be coached by someone I'd known for years. I knew she understood what I was trying to achieve. And I trusted her.

One of her first questions was this: "What stand-out thing would you like to achieve this year?" I replied: "You know what – I'd love to do a TEDx talk." She said: "You know what – I'm helping to organise one!"

I'd known her for years without realising she had a role organising our local TEDx. I went on to apply through the proper channel and got the speaking opportunity I really wanted.

The moral of this story is this: until we give voice to our hopes and dreams, it's not possible for others to step up and help us in the way they'd like to. Until we speak up, we never know how the person sitting

beside us (even someone we've known for years) might be able to help.

Look at yourself through other eyes

Take a little time to review your recent communications. Ask yourself these questions:

- Do you sound natural?
- Do you need to open up? Or reign in?
- Are people able to sense your values easily?
- Is your content generous? Or written in anticipation of getting something back?

Try to look at your content from the viewpoint of your ideal audience. Stand in their shoes for a while. Do you come across as open, honest, and authentic?

If you find this too hard, ask someone you trust (but not someone you have a close relationship with) to give you some honest feedback.

Hear yourself through another voice

Sometimes the very best way to shine your light is to let someone else do it on your behalf. So how do you make that happen?

Imagine this...

It's a year from now and someone has written an article about you. Or you've been interviewed for a podcast, or for someone else's blogpost, or if you're really brave or lucky, on radio or TV.

Let your imagination run with this. Then write down brief answers to the following questions:

- Where has this article, interview or blogpost appeared?
- What does it say about you?
- What does it say about your work, your service, or your product?

Take your time answering, but don't go into too much detail. Just allow yourself the luxury of imagining something great happening for you – something that will raise your profile.

Meditate on your answer for a while. What does it tell you about the scale of your ambitions? Does it help you imagine what sort of public profile you would like for yourself?

When your inner voice says, ‘No way!’

I was used to talking to small groups, running workshops and training sessions. I was pretty good at that. But the notion of ‘public speaking’ completely freaked me out. Not least because everyone else – even quite confident people – seemed to be freaked out by it too. What chance had I?

Then, in 2015, I delivered a TEDx talk. I was very nearly sick before I went on stage. But I did it. Now, I’m happy to talk in front of audiences all over the country, and globally via Zoom. What changed? The answers may surprise you.

Lightbulb moment #1: Learning to speak in public is not the goal

I stopped looking at the talk as the end goal. The talk alone didn’t give me enough incentive to push past the fear.

So, what is the greater goal? Well, it’s all the goodies that come from learning to talk effectively in public. Talks provide me with a stream of new coaching clients, many more than I get from social media or my website. And being in front of people

creates a powerful connection and a sense of credibility that can't be earned any other way.

Being able to speak in front of an audience is a superpower. And, if the truth is told, you don't have to be super slick. A bit of wobbly authenticity makes you much more approachable. I'd rather listen to a nervous person speaking from the heart than a highly polished presenter trotting out a well-rehearsed script.

Lightbulb moment #2: I wasn't scared of the public speaking

I was more scared of the unpleasant physical sensations of fear – the sweaty palms, dry mouth, sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach – than of the talk itself. Well, here's the rub. Those sensations remain with me, but I have learned to be friends with them, so they don't bother me anymore.

When nerves kick in – and they always will – everyone feels much the same things. If you try and fight the feelings down, they simply get worse. Interestingly, it's this fear of fear that can trigger a panic attack.

The trick is to notice and become familiar with our fears. We can even give them a name. I call mine

my ‘public speaking collywobbles’. They are now like a faithful friend who appears whenever I am about to step up and do something challenging. They are a reminder to stay on my toes. I now channel my collywobbles into creating something positive and full of life.

Lightbulb moment #3: My fears were there to protect me

If we didn’t feel fear, we could end up in all sorts of trouble. The anxieties that arose when I thought about public speaking were really all about risk management. They were there to make sure I paid attention to what was going on around me.

What can we do to work with greater confidence and resilience?

Let me end this section with a few quick tips that capture what we’ve covered:

- Be a little bolder each day – test the confidence-building techniques I shared earlier.
- Identify your ‘greater goal’ – dig past the obvious goal to the thing you really want to accomplish.

- Play to your strengths – find the way of working and communicating that makes use of your superpowers.
- Communicate in ways and places that you prefer – you're more likely to find the audience you want to reach.
- Think about how you can tell your story – and gather the 'assets' that make it easier.
- Connect with people who get who you are and what you care about –they will help you with the changes you want to make in your life.

LEADING QUIET PEOPLE

*“Leaders must either invest a reasonable amount of time attending to fears and feelings or squander an unreasonable amount of time trying to manage ineffective and unproductive behaviour.” – Brené Brown, *Dare to Lead**

This section of the book deals with issues around quietness in the workplace. It explores how leaders, coaches and facilitators can support quieter people to contribute their superpowers.

Why is quiet an inclusion issue?

Let’s start with some facts and figures:

- Introversion affects 30–50% of the population (read *Quiet* by Susan Cain).
- A significant additional proportion are quiet or do not seem to engage for other reasons that can include health issues, trauma, processing or hearing impairments, and other personal circumstances.
- There is a strong cultural bias towards extroverts.

- Extroverts typically access more opportunities and higher pay scales.

I need to be clear. This is not about us versus them. It's not about quiet people versus more socially engaged people, or introvert versus extrovert. It's about creating a safe container – a culture of psychological safety – a place where everyone can speak up without fear.

Greater inclusion needs to be negotiated, not imposed. It requires us to support people to express who they are – to bring all of themselves and their qualities to work. And this involves taking the time to understand the neurobiological differences that can make this harder for quiet people.

Question: Is adopting this approach consistent with your current organisational values? If not, why not?

What if we ignore quiet people's contributions?

If we want the best from our people and the best for our organisations, we need to think about the value we lose when quiet people don't feel able to engage or contribute. It has implications for your 'triple bottom line': financial, cultural, and environmental.

Quiet people make sense of the world differently. If the quiet people in our organisations stay quiet, we lose a quality of thinking that we need. Often this thinking involves a special degree of conscientiousness or creativity. Or an aptitude for logic, or for spotting issues that others miss. Or an empathy for customers we find harder to reach. We can't afford to miss out on the different thinking that quiet people can contribute.

When anyone feels disengaged, they lose motivation. Their contribution diminishes. They fail to thrive. And quiet people are no different. What makes this issue different for our organisations is that we may not notice when it happens. Quiet people are more likely to internalise their loss of confidence, their frustrations, their sense of not being valued. At best we might not notice their withdrawal. At worst, we may not spot the

microaggressions, teasing or even bullying that quiet people can endure.

The leaders in our organisations may not be therapists or counsellors. But there is a strong argument to help them develop the skills they need to include the quiet people in their teams – to listen, to adapt and to support. Ignoring quiet people’s contributions has serious implications if it is not addressed.

A Psychotherapeutic Viewpoint

This contribution is from Janine Piccirella, a Nottingham based expert on trauma.

‘It’s a natural disposition in ‘being human’ that we communicate in the way that we long to be communicated with. This position can be helpful if we happen to be communicating with someone holding the same or similar style. However, we must hold awareness of diversity in communication styles.

As communication is complex this involves us being curious and open about “how do I best connect *with* this person?”. The word ‘with’ is intentional, as our natural disposition of ‘same’ can be experienced as

being communicated 'at'. To be communicated 'at' will no doubt be damaging in building connection.

Along with this, for us to require that people are the 'same' as us involves high levels of Discounting (J. Schiff et al, 1975) of what is needed to connect. If we do not hold awareness, this can cause disruptions in communication and at worst ruptures in relationships.

Being Discounted (Ibid) is an experience I hear a lot when working therapeutically with a quiet person. There is a theme that they are often required organisationally to 'play a role' to be accepted, included, and valued.

Assumptions can be made, leading to judgements about the quiet person. Sadly, these judgements may not only be expressed implicitly, but at worst are explicitly communicated. This consequently causes disconnect and pain, missing the persons qualities and them possibly being pushed into the corner of Shame.

These pressures to play a role also known as "Don't be you" (R, Goulding, and M. Goulding, 1979) has a damaging impact on the person. This can include physical and mental illnesses leading to incapacitation and burnout. Depression/low mood,

Anxiety/Anxiety attacks, sleep disturbance or yearning for more, impact on eating, agitation, and angry outbursts; are but a few possible symptoms of burnout.

In response of adapting towards the required 'Don't be you' (Ibid) this can evoke impostor-syndrome. Where the quiet person experiences negative self-talk, resulting in Guilt (for what I've done or not done) or at worst Shame (for who I am, or not). Unfortunately, this can lead to re-traumatisation of the original wound that led to the person's quiet behaviour.

"Be forward coming", "show your confidence, like me" these messages can be damaging and possibly reinforcing for why the person is quiet in the first place. We all have stories or Script (E. Berne, 1961) for why we feel, think, and behave. Holding this in mind is helpful both for the 'quiet person' and 'non-quiet person' we all have a Script, all have reasons why we are who we are. Being tender towards the why is an expression of wanting to gain a respectful working relationship.

Being mindful that building trust is an important aspect of feeling Accounted (J. Schiff et al, 1975), seen and therefore belong. This requires both the quiet person and the other to hold; Inquiry,

Attunement, and Involvement (R. Erskine, 1993).
Connection is a bilateral phenomenon.

How do I belong and be me? This question is one with depth in acceptance of self and others. I invite leaders and managers to ponder on what they need in relationship with themselves and their quiet team members to make work easier’.

Refs:

Goulding R, Goulding M, (1976) ‘Injunctions, decisions and redecisions’. Transactional Analysis Journal, 6, 1

J. Schiff (1975) Cathexis reader: transactional analysis treatment of psychosis. New York: Harper & Row

R. Erskine (1993) Transactional Analysis Journal, *Volume 23, Number 4*

What do quiet people want?

Quiet people want what all of us want:

- to feel safe
- to know that they matter
- a peaceful, resourceful environment
- the freedom to talk – when they feel ready – and to be listened to without judgement.

Quiet people don't want continuous suggestions that they develop their soft skills. They want to be included as they are. They want their organisations to make the adjustments they need – adjustments that make it easier for everyone to engage at work.

What helps quiet people perform at their best?

Quiet people can give their best when:

- Their quietness is respected.
- They don't feel under pressure to act like an extrovert.
- It's understood that they may take longer to process information – but you might just get a better solution if you give them the time.

- They can bring their specific sensitivities into play – those same sensitivities can give rise to amazing insights.

Person or culture?

It's important not to simply allow a 'quiet' person to blend into the background. They need to be seen and valued as an integral part of the team. Not everyone would call themselves 'quiet', but they might still feel uncomfortable in pressured situations. Quiet people thrive when they can take responsibility and demonstrate their abilities.

So, when is it rightly a quiet person's turn to step up and when is it the organisation that needs to step up?

It's not enough to say that quiet people should stand up for themselves. The kinds of situations that more extrovert employees might take in their stride (or at least appear to) can be much more challenging for quiet people. Disapproval, blame-shifting and conflict, for example, can trigger fight, flight, or freeze responses, which lead them to simply comply or go quiet to make the threat go away. So can feeling compelled to behave like an extrovert to survive in the workplace and being told they need to speak up.

When a quiet person is required to adapt to a communication style that isn't a good fit for them, it places a huge load upon them. Short term, this is stressful. Over a longer period of time, it erodes their confidence and affects their well-being in the workplace and ultimately their mental health.

Quieter people can take longer to process information and they do so in a different way. As a result, they often engage in better-quality thinking, generating valuable ideas and insights which can get lost in the rush of decision-making – especially when the most energetic contributors are allowed most of the speaking time. If quieter voices give up contributing, believing their efforts are neither recognised nor rewarded, the strengths and insights they are hired for are lost and the effectiveness of the whole team is diminished.

It's neither costly nor difficult to notice when the contribution of a quiet person is being lost in the noise of a team. And it's the responsibility of the organisation, not the individual, to evaluate what is being lost and change the culture for everyone's benefit.

Bringing out the best in quiet people

A great deal of effort and money is expended on recruitment – investment that is lost when an organisation or its culture fails to accommodate different ways of thinking and processing information. High-quality, well-considered insight gets lost in the gap between the quiet person's need for time to think and the organisation's inbuilt desire to proceed apace.

It's not up to leaders and managers to come up with all the solutions. That's not inclusive. Consulting with quiet people around their needs is much better practice. Better still, get everyone round the table for an open and honest discussion.

Here are some suggestions – validated by quiet people themselves – that can help everyone give their best work:

- Send agendas out well in advance of meetings.
- Support quieter team members with preparation for meetings and assist them in introducing ideas.
- Let team members consider ideas and solutions individually before bringing them to a

meeting – this allows introverts quiet time to process and bring their energy and creativity to the problem.

- Create a variety of options for input and feedback.
- Create one-to-one opportunities for quiet people to share their ideas and reflections.
- Give people enough time to think and reflect before decisions are made – allow post-meeting feedback by email the following day, for example.
- Access the wisdom of the crowd – gather it electronically or in writing and make sure people can't see each other's ideas until everyone's had a chance to contribute. Face-to-face contact is important for building trust, but group dynamics can impede creative thinking.
- Acknowledge how slowing down the process can speed up delivery of the best answers. (Source: *Time to Think* by Nancy Kline.)
- Introduce an ethos of WAIT – Why Am I Talking? Ask more energetic team members to

consider the proportion of time that's taken up by their input and invite them to moderate it where necessary.

- Discuss shared values – this helps everyone understand the culture they are working within and how best to direct their message.
- Offer training and practice that's accessible and takes into account people's preferences, so that everyone can develop the skills to speak up or gain confidence if they wish.
- Train people to facilitate effectively and inclusively.
- Use 'quiet-friendly' facilitation tools and techniques, for example Nancy Kline's thinking environment.
- Create the right environment – quiet and highly sensitive people are much more sensitive to their surroundings.
- Allow as much time as is required – be ready to stay with the 'not knowing' instead of rushing to a conclusion.

- Give permission for team members to respond or behave differently, for example spend time reflecting alone prior to feeding back.
- Take time to understand individual requirements and to respond and provide support where necessary.
- Change the protocols for video calls – allow muted video by default.
- Encourage quieter team members to use the chat function – using chat increases feedback and input.
- When asking a group to feed back using chat, you'll get fuller participation if you get everyone to type in their comments but hold off from hitting return until you give the signal. Then everyone hits return simultaneously. That way no-one gets anchored on someone else's comment – it all appears at exactly the same time. Use a 3,2,1 countdown and explain why you are doing this – it will be greatly appreciated, and you'll get much better-quality feedback.
- Before team decisions, give everyone 3–4 minutes to reflect and make notes with

cameras OFF – this gives everyone the processing time they need and improves the quality of decision-making.

“When we moved to using Teams for meetings, a lot of people were initially quite vocal in expecting people to have cameras on. This has definitely shifted and there’s much more understanding that for some people this isn’t what they want or need.”
– Team Leader, Natural England

A corporate approach to working with quiet people.

An interview with Claire Foy, Head of Capability, Coutts Bank.

“Hi Claire, when somebody arrives in one of your teams, and it's clear that they're a quiet person or an introvert or neurodiverse are there specific ways that you work to create inclusion for them, and if so, how?”

We use a tool called Spotlight by a company called Mindflick. Once people have settled into their role, we use it to help them understand themselves better, and obviously, for the leaders to understand their people better.

We've also worked with leaders on how to read situations without the profile. For example, if they have a team meeting and know they have reflectors involved, we suggest sending the agenda and anything to read out, beforehand.

We would share any questions we're going to ask, what we may want to discuss or decisions we might want to reach agreement on with plenty of time before the meeting for those who need more thinking time to reflect.

We're encouraging leaders not to expect an answer in the moment, but to give people a period of time to reflect – however, with a deadline.

For example, “I don't need to know right now, but I do need to know by tomorrow morning”. It might not be quite as long as some reflectors would like, but it's not a demand for an immediate answer.

We say to leaders, if you demand an answer in the moment you *will* get an answer – but it's unlikely to be the answer the reflector wants to give. Often after they have had time to think they will answer in another way, one more fitting to their actual thoughts, so patience and planning really pays off, to ensure diversity of thought.

With people that are more reflective we know giving them deadlines helps with reflection time boundaries, whereas with somebody with a faster reaction often a deadline is ignored, they'll likely do it immediately and cross it off their list. However, knowing they can change their mind up until the deadline, can sometimes force them to reflect more. So, deadlines are important for both faster and slower thinking people. We are happy to say to people ‘Go away and think about it, come back and let us know’.

“Do you actively manage faster thinkers so as to create space for more reflective thinkers?”

We're trying to get faster thinking leaders to value their own reflection time more. Our flagship leadership programme is called THiNK for exactly that reason. If we have someone who is predominantly faster to react, they tend to want to deliver outcome after outcome. Encouraging them to slow down by slowing down our own responses, or reactions to them, gives everyone more time to consider what is the problem we are solving for, rather than jumping to solution without due care and attention to the actual issue.

When we coach our more reflective people, we encourage them to come up with phrases and sentences that they are comfortable with so that they can naturally use these when they feel under pressure, and they need to ask for more time to consider.

So, for example, if they must present to important stakeholders or clients, this pressure to be immediate with responses can create an anxiety and they may become flustered and start to lack confidence. They may worry that they're going to be asked questions in the moment that they can't

answer. If we don't prepare them, the nerves can build up beforehand and ruin things even though they're probably more prepared than anybody else and they know their stuff.

So, we help them to come up with time-buying sentences like "That's really interesting. I hadn't thought about that. You know, do you mind if I take it away and think about it?" or "I'll have to go and look at that. I want to take the time to get this right for you."

When we ask them 'Why do you need to reflect when you know your stuff?', they tell us mainly it's because they want to get it right – Thinker speakers think first and speak later. They don't want to say something wrong. So, we encourage them to simply say that, explain the pause. We find this can also help the other person slow down.

When we when we mirror that situation back to them and ask them to imagine they are with somebody in the room who doesn't say an awful lot, and when asked a question, ponders, and says I'm going to need to look at that and come back to you. How do you see that person? The answer is often that they are composed, thoughtful and have gravitas. So, you know it's a good thing to be considered.

We try and slow the fast people down. We try and speed the reflectors up so that we meet in this nice middle ground where we're able to move forward. That's what we try and do, value difference. Not everybody does it, but it's a solid work in progress.

“Do you use or encourage any meeting facilitation techniques? Like Time to Think or Thinking Environments?”

Not in meetings so much, but certainly in coaching. Our coaching team run team coaching sessions with senior leadership teams, and we have used Time to Think several times.

You may have a team of 10 – out of which eight could be our faster, speaker-thinkers, and two much more reflective (thinker-speakers). This makes sure everyone gets a time of their own to speak. The first time we did it with one of our most senior teams, we sat there fingers crossed. It was on Zoom, and everyone was going to get three minutes each to share their thoughts on the team's behaviours. We thought, this is either going to bomb or it's going to be brilliant.

It was very revealing for both faster and slower thinkers to get a timed, uninterrupted space to air their thoughts. A great deal of powerful content

came out that which otherwise would not have been said, but more importantly it would not have been heard by everyone. It was refreshing to observe.

I think the turning point for the team was in not being able to interrupt or respond out of turn, not being interrupted when in flow, and the utter honesty that came out. It was incredibly impactful for all. We now encourage it with other teams, and our senior teams ask us to run these sessions for them regularly.

We've been talking to our leaders about situations when the proverbial hits the fan for them – when the pressure pot boils - and how they react in these times. Faster people tend to go faster and slower tend to become more reflective. So, understanding how your impact as a leader in these times affects others is key. If you speed up and want delivery to be quicker and punchier, you simply wind up the cog. Others receiving this pressure will either also wind up the cog (faster), or slow down even further (reflector) – this creates deeper frustration between colleagues in times of pressure. Faster thinkers see they need more delivery, slower thinkers see they need more time to think through – we must bring these two thoughts together or the polarisation of these pressured behaviours can make matters much worse.

We're aiming to have everyone, but our leaders in particular, to see the two different behaviours. They're different, that's ok, but we must value both, not just our own. We need our leaders to notice their leadership shadow and understand that to land a message to all, you need to think about those receiving, not just deliver in your style. Some need it slowed down, others won't – we have to demonstrate a roundedness, this is simply more inclusive and will land the message better

I've been using Mindflick's Spotlight tool for understanding behaviours and mindsets for four years now. It's literally a thread through my body. I am aware of it constantly and I can notice these strengths in people a mile away. It's almost like a photographic memory of who leads with what just because of their behaviours and mindsets are so transparent when you take the time to observe more deeply.

By watching, feeling, and listening we can see who is reflective and adjust the pace to suit. It's about what people need from you, not what you need from them.

“In your recruitment process do you make any allowances for people who are neurodiverse or deeply introvert or is it a standard? Do they do the same as everybody else?”

When we interview, we follow a centralised process which has been tried and tested to meet all the inclusivity requirement, although I’m sure there is always room for improvement. It's the same for both internal and external candidates, based on whether they are right for the role, whether they are ready for the role, and three competency style questions.

There is usually a time limit on it of an hour, with around 10-15 minutes dedicated to the competency questions. The process is very clear, so people get plenty of time to prepare.

We encourage people to take their time, write down the question we’re asking. To make sure they’ve got the right answer before they start speaking. We encourage people to slow down and encourage reflection. We certainly wouldn't mark somebody down for taking their time to think.

EPILOGUE

What can a quiet person do?

Finally, what can a quiet person do to try to change things for the better – for themselves and for others? It's about shining light into dark corners, I think. Many small acts of positivity are just as effective as great big ones.

That's purpose enough for me – to encourage and energise people to believe in themselves enough to make their contribution, however humble. To step off the treadmill, celebrate their difference, resist the huge pressure to simply comply and conform. To create something that carries their unique values and strengths out into the world.

Quiet is a sanctuary, but it can also be a hiding place. And the world needs thoughtful people more than ever right now.

So, what can a quiet person do to step up and make a difference?

1. Think about the change you can make in the world. Think about your legacy and what you can do that will have a positive impact. It

doesn't have to be big. If you have a gift, however humble, you can choose to share it.

2. Work with other quiet souls. It lightens the load and takes away the loneliness. Collaborate sooner rather than later. We are stronger together.
3. Do something to reveal the energy that's wrapped up in your quiet. It doesn't need to be big. It doesn't need to be noisy. It may simply be about sharing your unique insight. Create a shift, however small.

Even the tiniest pebble creates ripples right to the edge of the pond.

What can you do together?

- Negotiate for more inclusive practices at work.
- Ask for a place on the agenda.
- Ask for more time to prepare.
- Ask to give feedback after a meeting – not in it.
- Deflect the gaze – make your contribution from outside the spotlight.

- Team up with someone more outgoing who can help create space for you.
- Use this book to raise awareness of what it means to be quiet.
- Collaborate with other quiet souls to create more inclusive spaces in life and at work.
- Cultivate the ability to build networks one person at a time.
- When networking, identify one person to meet and think ahead about what you want to ask them.
- Be old fashioned: find an introducer or a go-between.
- Develop a highly targeted strategy for building contacts.
- Use social media for research rather than broadcasting.
- Notice, collect, curate, share.

- Use other people's voices to amplify your message.

When you are a quiet person, the healthiest ways of being in the world are there for the taking. You don't have to change a thing about who you are. Find and cultivate places of flow and ease. Whether it's walking, reading, making, listening, thinking, meditating – use these places wisely.

Make better choices about who you spend your precious time with. Create more useful boundaries. Say no more often. Say yes to the right things. Find people who will support and value you the way you are. Stop pushing at closed doors.

Buddies and amplifiers

We are all looking for other people who get who we are and share our world view. We all seek out others whose values, beliefs, wants and needs mirror our own – people with whom we can travel through work and life in comfort and security. If you don't currently have someone like this, seek them out.

A **buddy** is someone who gets what you are trying to do, will support you on that path and, where necessary, hold you to account. This type of

challenge and support has been shown to be just as effective as coaching in some circumstances.

An **amplifier** is someone who will add their voice to yours – who will speak up on your behalf and add energy to your message. They may help you get the traction you need to make the change you want.

A Buddy/Amplifier story

One particularly shy individual teamed up with a more socially energetic team member and came to the following agreement. She would place a pen on the table in front of her, which she would pick up whenever she found herself faltering. On this signal, the amplifier took over the narrative until such time as she saw the pen being put down, at which point she handed the baton back to the shy person. This arrangement worked very nicely for this pair and the shy person's ability to contribute grew quickly simply because she knew she had the safety net.

Before we end...

I'd like to encourage you to reflect for a while. If you've been taking notes and doing the exercises, review them. Let them sink in. Use your wonderful superpowers of careful thought and reflection.

Then think about these questions. They are simple but powerful.

What?

What's just happened here? What are the learnings, stand-out moments and lightbulbs that may have lit up for you?

So what?

What are the implications for you? What's meaningful about this? Where's it hitting home? And how?

Now what?

What comes next? What do you want to do, develop, change, ask for?

WHAT NOW?

WHAT JUST HAPPENED?

✎ _____
✎ _____
✎ _____
✎ _____
✎ _____

SO WHAT?

✎ _____
✎ _____
✎ _____
✎ _____
✎ _____

NOW WHAT?

✎ _____
✎ _____
✎ _____
✎ _____
✎ _____



FIRST STEPS...

✎ _____
✎ _____
✎ _____
✎ _____
✎ _____

Take your pebble. Drop it in the pond. Watch the ripples spread...

Mental Health Resources

United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy

<https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/find-a-therapist>

NHS (IATP)

<https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-a-psychological-therapies-service/>

Mental Health England

<https://mhfaengland.org/mhfa-centre/resources/>

Mental Health UK

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk>

Ripple Suicide Prevention

www.ripplesuicideprevention.com

Chasing the Stigma, Hub of Hope

<https://hubofhope.co.uk>

Frazzled Café

<https://www.frazzledcafe.org/>

Self Space – MH resources for organisations

<http://theselfspace.com>

Young Minds

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk>

Shout – 24/7 text support

<https://giveusashout.org>

Man Health – peer support groups

<https://www.manhealth.org.uk>

Women’s peer support programme – MIND

<https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/influence-and-participation-toolkit/womens-mental-health-peer-support-programme/>

7 cups – 24/7 chat support

<https://www.7cups.com>

CHAYN – help for women experiencing abuse

<https://www.chayn.co>

Male Survivors Partnership – for male victims/survivors of sexual abuse.

<https://malesurvivor.co.uk>

How to select a coach or therapist.

If you are thinking of working with a coach or therapist, here are a few tips to help you get started.

Where do you begin?

Ask around among the people you know. Friends and colleagues can often be a good start. People love making recommendations, but choosing a coach isn't quite as straightforward as picking a plumber. Yes, you need someone with all the right qualifications and experience. But you are setting up a close working relationship with someone, and it's the quality of that relationship in the end, not their qualifications alone, that will determine whether this process really works for you. Take your time.

A balance of head and heart

If you don't know anyone who can make a recommendation, a 'directory' can help. There are a few good ones around. Or you can use the power of LinkedIn to get suggestions flowing your way. Many coaches and therapists on LinkedIn are writing and talking openly about their craft, so you have a chance to get a sense of the person behind the

label. We are all different, and you may find you start to gravitate towards some of us and not others. That gravitational pull is essential – it means you are starting to get a feel for what sort of coach might suit you.

Chemistry

The chemistry must be right. It needs to be a relationship that ‘feels’ right, where there is mutual trust, respect, and a sense of being at ease in each other’s company. This is why the initial conversations with your ‘shortlist’ are so important.

Values

We tend to work best when the relationship is based on viewpoints and values. I find that people who see themselves as quiet, thoughtful, creative, or driven by a sense of fairness and purpose often find their way to me. Why? Because I write and speak a lot about these things and my values ‘leak’ out into the world. What values might you be looking for in a coach or therapist? It’s an excellent question to ask in an initial conversation.

Must my coach or therapist understand my sector?

A well-trained, experienced coach or therapist should be able to work with anyone. Remember, it's the quality of the relationship that underpins the success of the work. And sometimes it can be really refreshing to work with someone who's not ingrained with your working culture and norms. However, sometimes it really helps if your coach or therapist does understand the specifics of your situation. Find a person you think you can work with, then explore the pros and cons of this thoroughly.

Creativity and playfulness

Some professionals will encourage you to couple the work to your innate talents and interests. Do you like the outdoors? Some encourage walking and talking, which can be amazingly effective. Do you like working with line and colour? Find someone who will help you bring your thinking and creative imaging together. Are you a natural writer? Most coaches or therapists will encourage journaling as a way of helping the thinking and reflection flow. It's about using thinking and creativity to help you imagine how your life might be lived differently.

Challenge

Trusting that you have the right person makes it much easier to cope with the challenging nature of coaching or therapy. You know that the coach has your best interests at heart. It's not about giving you solutions or telling you what to do. It's about helping you become the most informed and resourced person you can be, so you can step up and make your own great decisions about what comes next. The right person will be a champion for you.

Set up some calls

Above all, don't be scared to send a few emails or make a few calls. You'll get a feel for each person you talk to within minutes. The conversation should be open and friendly. It should acknowledge and explore the fact that the relationship has got to work both ways. If anything feels odd, it probably is! Most coaches and therapists are friendly, thoughtful people who will ask you great questions. The answers you come up with will help you make the right choice.

Good luck!

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Before you go!

Need a quick exercise to settle your thinking? Copy this and think about all the things you want less of/more of in your life.



Good Luck!

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