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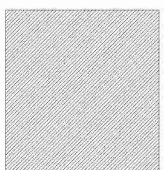


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EEOE



Despite odds, introverts shine

HOW TO OVERCOME SHYNESS AND REACH YOUR CAREER GOALS

Quiet and timid as a little girl, Laurie Nichols is now a CEO.

Her job at Hands On Georgia involves courting donors, meeting with board directors and managing a staff. But Nichols still considers herself an introvert.

"I'm someone who listens a lot more than she talks," the 44-year-old said.

Introverts can get a bad rap — they're often mistaken for being aloof, anti-social, fearful and slow on the uptake. Professional life can be challenging for introverts, because most careers require employees to be seen, heard, and a tad self-promotional. It's even more important in a competitive job market.

But introverts are simply more comfortable speaking one-on-one than working a room, said Jennifer Kahnweiler, a career consultant who studied Nichols and other introverts in her book, "[The Introverted Leader: Building on Your Quiet](#)

[Strength](#)." They prefer to think things over before they weigh in, she said, and periodically need time alone to recharge.

Here are suggestions for introverts trying to succeed in the workplace and on the job hunt:

1. Plan ahead

Time management is particularly important for introverts. If spending long periods of time with people exhausts you, don't plan too many back-to-back meetings. Instead, schedule breaks every day so you can re-energize. "I look for little ways to disappear," Nichols said. This sort of time management is just as important during the job hunt as it is in the workplace. The last thing a boss wants to see during a job interview is an applicant who seems tired, irritable or distracted. Schedule only one formal interview a day, and before each one, give yourself some "alone time."

Rehearsal is important, too. Because introverts usually don't like speaking off the cuff — especially about themselves — they should get in the habit of jotting down talking points before meetings and interviews and practicing articulating them.

Bob Goodyear, a technology product manager at the software company Symantec, has taught himself to go into every meeting with something to say within the first five minutes. The 53-year-old introvert also researches customers before conferences so he can tackle the events quickly and strategically. "I can do anything for 30 minutes," Goodyear said. "I break it down into small parts. I like to say I'm a calculated extrovert."

2. Use technology, but don't hide behind it

Introverts tend to be good writers, so e-mail is an introvert's best friend. It's a great way for them to

organize thoughts at their own speed. Online social networking is a helpful tool, too. From the comfort of their desks, introverts can create dynamic profiles that highlight their strengths, research potential employers, meet new people and reconnect with old colleagues.

But there's a downside to technology, according to Nichols: "It can be a crutch."

Introverts must not forget that e-mails and online networking must be supplemented with face-to-face time. Virtual communication should be viewed as a doorway, a short-cut, a way to sidestep awkward small-talk and put oneself on the radar. But when it comes time to discuss something important or turn a new contact into a strong ally, it should be done in person.

"Putting a face to the name makes a big difference. At some point, you need to graduate the rela-

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tionship into the more human realm," said Nancy Ancowitz, a business communication coach and author of the book, "Self-Promotion for Introverts."

3. Push yourself, but be yourself

Introverts often need to leave their comfort zone, but that doesn't mean they should try to morph into extroverts.

"Don't be self-promotional in a way that's unnatural," said Ben Dattner, an organizational psychologist and adjunct professor at New York University. "It's more likely to backfire than help you."

Introverts should remember that they excel at things that many extroverts don't. Their skills, psychologists say, include listening, researching, writing, staying calm and focused, and picking up on nonverbal cues.

So if the thought of chatting with dozens of strangers at a conference or cocktail party sounds daunting, focus instead on making strong bonds with a handful of people and follow up with them after-

wards. Chances are you'll be meeting some other introverts, too, who would rather talk individually over coffee anyway.

And if you can't dominate the conversation at a given meeting, don't chalk it up as a failure — loop back with coworkers afterward to tell them your ideas. "Introverts need to cultivate social skills in a way that feels comfortable for them, not in a way that violates who they are," said Carol Dweck, a Stanford University psychology professor and author of the book, "Mindset: The New Psychology of Success."

4. A sense of humor goes a long way

It's a quality that everyone should have. But because introverts don't wear their personalities on their sleeves, it's especially important for them to make a concerted effort to show their sense of humor, Kahnweiler said. Break the ice with a witty observation or a funny story to show that there's more to your personality behind that calm exterior.

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