

# KEEPING YOUR SANITY BY HAVING THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

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People who are extroverts – people who are more

sociable, who like to be out, talk, and interact with other people, and who gladly put themselves out into new situations – tend to be happier than people who are not.

That's great for those who, by temperament, happen to be extroverts. But what if we're not naturally extroverted? We can still improve our overall happiness by *doing extroverted things*.

The delightful truth is that, from simply taking more extroverted actions, our overall happiness grows about the same as if we were naturally extroverted.

If you tend to be an introvert, if your natural comfort is to be more solitary, shy, or quietly inward, I'm not suggesting that you deny your nature, or pretend to be someone that you're not. There are significant strengths to introversion that I'll discuss in a moment.

But you can get some of the benefits of an extrovert as well by practicing certain skills; then you can have the best of both worlds.

Try doing something each day that challenges you to be more outgoing. Don't worry about doing the world's most socially engaging activity – you don't have to become some social thrill-seeker. *What matters is the direction, not the mileage.*

Start with activities that push you a little bit, but that are manageable. Find things that you'll enjoy, that you genuinely would want to do, and do them at a pace and to a degree where you won't be overwhelmed.

You can start by joining a group activity that you think you might enjoy. Think of what you like to do

anyway... then just add people. If you like to exercise, join a fun exercise class; if you like to read, join a book club.

Nudge yourself to talk with the checkout person at the store, the person next to you on a plane... look around and notice people. Make eye contact with people more often (don't stare), say hello to people in passing rather than looking away.

Purposefully arrange to go out and be with friends more often. Check out Toastmasters, or take an acting or improvisation class.

These are just some examples to get your own ideas started. As with most anything, the secret is to do a little bit that you can easily manage nearly every day. It's the practice, the repetition, the refinement of skills over time that makes them a part of you.

*Design these activities with success in mind.* If we push ourselves for too big of a stretch, we run the risk of having it go badly, feeling awful, and being less likely to try such things again anytime soon. If we challenge ourselves – but reasonably – then we're more likely to succeed, have a good time, and look forward to the next challenge.

You'll find that you become more comfortable doing extroverted things as time goes on.

As the late Paul Harvey used to say, "Now for the rest of the story..."

There are advantages of being an extrovert. It's a happier life in many ways, you're likely to have more friends and acquaintances and get more accolades for your accomplishments; people will be more naturally drawn to you, and you'll tend to be in a position to make things happen in a more obvious fashion.

There are also many benefits to introversion, but they tend to be, well, *quieter* strengths than are seen with extraversion. Quieter, but indispensable.

First of all, there is a difference between introversion and shyness – though they can certainly overlap. Shyness involves a degree of anxiety that introversion does not, and shyness revolves around a fear of social disapproval, whereas introversion is a temperamental preference that may have nothing to do with anxiety.

Much of the most important creative work is done in solitude, and the most creative people in many fields are introverts.

Introverts tend to dislike conflict, which can be troublesome if there's conflict which needs to be confronted, but it can also be a great strength not to be actively looking for discord where it needn't exist.

An introvert will tend to concentrate easily, and stay focused on a task for long periods of time.

Some very effective leaders are also introverts: Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, and the late publisher Katharine Graham are just a few examples. Not surprisingly, their style is much different from the kind of charismatic leader who will move people to enthusiastically follow them.

It can be wonderful when a charismatic leader inspires people to bring forth more than they had ever thought possible; but just as often such leaders can inspire people to follow them right off a cliff.

The introverted leader is more likely to support others to take charge of their own ideas, and can be more focused on reaching the goal than on getting credit for reaching that goal.

As President, Ronald Reagan had a plaque on his desk that read, “*There is no limit to what a man can do or where he can go if he does not mind who gets the credit.*” A more introverted leader is more likely to embrace that spirit, which can quietly yet powerfully draw out the best in people.

Introverts also remind us that *not everything worth doing is worth doing in a group*. We have become culturally so enamored of working together in teams or groups, that it’s easy to forget that much of the best productive work people do is done on their own.

So while there is certainly much to be said for extroversion, and for doing extraverted things even if they don’t come naturally to us, introversion also holds tremendous strengths.

The key is to find *your own personal golden mean*. The Golden Mean as Aristotle described it is not some squishy compromise between two strong positions. It’s the optimal application of virtue: Courage is a virtue, but too much courage can be recklessness; too little can be cowardice.

What is the optimal balance of introversion/extroversion *for you*, given your natural temperament, your goals, your strengths, and your expectations and aspirations for the kind of life you want?

Temperament is not set in stone; it’s more like a flexible range. What’s right for you is not necessarily what feels most comfortable for you at any given moment; what is most comfortable for you may include lots of bad habits that are limiting you. What’s *optimal* for you is an honest and effective balance between your natural tendencies and your aspirations.

The question is not whether you should be an extrovert or an introvert. The question is: what kind of life do you want to create; what do you need to do to have integrity with your values and aspirations?

Strive to live with integrity, and you will find your own personal golden mean. Challenge yourself to stretch outside of your comfort zone toward your highest goals, and you will lead a happier life.

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PS: My new course, *Mastering Emotions, Moods and Reactions* can help you with this part of your life in much greater detail, with deep understanding and practical skills for mastering these systems and living well. You can get it now with a deep discount, for \$99, if you use this code: LB99.

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