

HIRING

FACILITATING SUCCESS

QUIET

FOR INTROVERTED INDIVIDUALS

TALENT

WRITTEN BY

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HELLO FROM THE AUTHOR

If you're reading this- hello, welcome, and thank you. Thank you for committing to fostering success for a unique type of applicant.

Survey data indicates that while between 1/3 and 1/2 of the US population identifies as introverted, leadership roles in organizations and corporations are often given to extroverted individuals. Make no mistake: this does not mean that introverts struggle to cultivate or demonstrate leadership potential. It simply means that we may need to reevaluate our metrics for leadership success- and this starts in the initial hiring process.

A bare-bones version of this guide was originally published in my first book, *The I's Have it*. However, I have expanded it here to elaborate on the suggested strategies, provide ideas to easily incorporate these practices into your routines, and generally espouse the benefits of enacting these measures.

It is my hope that you'll attract a more diverse, effective, and well-rounded workforce as a result of the information shared here. And if you happen upon any questions as you read or implement all that's here, I encourage you to reach out- I'm always happy to talk through this information with the willing. Happy reading, happy hiring, and take care,



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Please don't hesitate to reach out! I take questions about this content, suggestions on what to cover, and testimonials on how you use this information via Twitter (@ammamarfo), or via my contact page: <http://www.ammamarfo.com/about>

WHAT INTROVERSION IS...AND ISN'T

What Introversion Is

A neurologically based way of interacting with the world that drives one to identify strongly with thoughts, ideas, and abstract concepts.

A need to follow periods of high stimulation (from people, temperature, light, strong emotion, etc.) with time to recharge and restore energy levels.

An advantageous orientation in the professional world when ensuring that all ideas are heard and considered, and that a diversity of thought and interaction is represented on a team.

What Introversion Is Not

An aversion to social interaction or time with people. Introverts enjoy and excel at relationship building, though it may tire them at times.

A need to retreat or hide from the world due to shyness, awkwardness, or social ineptitude.

A need to opt out of social or stimulating activities for a lack of skill or desire. No skill, ability, or task is off limits to any temperament; we all need a supportive environment in which to moderate the energy it takes to do new or energy-spending things.

HOW INTROVERTS GET MISUNDERSTOOD

Nature abhors a vacuum, and when other people can't read us, they write their own story- not always one that we would choose or that's true to who we are."

-Sophia Dembling, *The Introvert's Way*

Years of conditioning, odd portrayals, and misunderstandings fueled by the cult of personality testing has given introverts a bad rap. Measured for years on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator as a lack of extroversion has left introverts painted as awkward social outcasts who don't have what it takes to be social, well-spoken, or high-functioning in a society that values all of those things coming easily amongst people. To Dembling's point above, the silence that is often characteristic of introverts gets filled by those who don't understand them - including other introverts, by the way - with assumptions like shy, aloof, inattentive, or rude.

But here's the truth.

Introversion is an orientation on the world that dictates energy usage and expenditure. That's it. It's not hating people, or disliking working with others. It's simply an understanding that these circumstances may sometimes take more energy to complete than for extroverts, who are wired to gain energy from these very same interactions. The silence that is often construed as rude or inattentive may be quite loud in the introvert's head, as they take in information, consider its implications, formulate questions, or other mental gymnastics that extroverts more often partake in out loud.

As a prospective employer, this is important information to have because certain behaviors you may have previously read as liabilities, can become assets with more information. And this guide, by its conclusion, will hopefully allow you to reinterpret some habits and behaviors as ones your team can benefit from. This next session will provide a primer on precisely that.

INTROVERTED ASSETS AT WORK

There are two neurotransmitters constantly at work in the brain: dopamine and acetylcholine. An orientation toward introversion or extroversion is simply a greater sensitivity to one of the two. Extroverts respond better to dopamine, while the introverted brain handles acetylcholine better.

Acetylcholine moves along longer neural pathways, which means that a response may take a bit longer than it would if dopamine was running the show. So, as an example, someone may not be at a loss for words or unprepared; the thought simply hasn't arrived where it needs to be yet. You don't have "nothing to say" when listening to others; but what you have to say may arrive a little later than expected. Offices and organizations that allow for this, will be a great fit for introverted candidates. The questions addressed ahead will help you harness these assets.

Some assets, per introversion researcher Jennifer Kahnweiler, that introverts bring to the workplace:

- **Taking Quiet Time**

In a world that places urgency on each action that we take, it is highly beneficial to have people on your team for whom quiet contemplation and reflection comes naturally. Innovation, consideration, and missing perspectives can be found in these quiet moments.

Where can you create these quiet moments for members of your team who need them to do their best work?

- **Preparation**

While ample preparation is not the exclusive province of the introverted employee, these members of your team are, in some ways, literally wired to come into high-stakes situations with the information required to inform, supplement, or challenge decisions being made and initiatives being built or improved.

How can you aid these employees in their quest for information?

- **Engaged Listening**

Just as you need team members who will bring information forth and speak on your behalf, you also need team members for whom sustained and nuanced listening comes naturally. Many introverts thrive on the intake of information, and so their minds prove adept at this challenge. Again, organizations committed to innovation and understanding the needs of their base will flourish with this skill in their arsenal.

Does your organization recognize and reward the need to listen on equal footing with the ability and skill to speak?

- **Focused Conversations**

Closely related to the skill of engaged listening, is the ability to have focused conversations. Deep dives into complicated topics are solidly in the wheelhouse of introverts, who can speak freely and knowledgeably when engaged in a topic they're excited about or well informed in. They're, again, literally wired to thrive in these conversations, including things that aren't being said but are implied through tone and body language.

What opportunities does the prospective role provide for focused conversation about the direction and motivation of projects, initiatives, and goals?

- **Writing + Social Media**

Many introverts thrive at asynchronous communication such as writing or planned audio/visual dispatches. The freedom to think through a response before sharing it makes their opinions clearer, more easily understood, and delivered with less stimulation than an off-the-cuff response would allow. This is not to say that introverts can't or won't speak publicly, but you may see a different and deeper side of them when they communicate in other ways. And given the ubiquitous and essential place that social media has in our society, how can introverts' usage of it bolster your organization and its reputation?

Does your organization value written, emailed, or otherwise expressed communication as it does in-person commentary? And how can thoughtful social media use contribute to this?



Who's Reading the Applications?

ANSWER: Everyone should. Here's why.

"When done well, the process of writing develops a depth of thinking and authenticity that jump off the page and can deeply influence others."

-Jennifer Kahnweiler, Quiet Influence

Jennifer Kahnweiler's above quote encapsulates well the power of writing for the introverted mind. As we've discussed earlier, the introverted mind is one that thrives in moments that reward deep dives into information, adequate time for reflection, and uninterrupted opportunities for expression. Incidentally, the written application is often the only time that introverts get to communicate in this fashion.

However, it is a common practice for a finite number of individuals to get to see "the trifecta" of the application, resume, and cover letter. Additional decision makers - prospective coworkers, collaborating departments, and others who assist in the interview process - are left to evaluate candidates without important information shared in the written materials. For all applications, but especially for introverts, this is a mistake.

Written materials are our best case to evaluate how a candidate works when given a deadline, in a solitary environment, and while able to work at their own pace. **In many cases, these are the same circumstances under which they would be doing the work they're being hired to do.** To rob any evaluators of their fitness for work of the chance to see the kind of work they do when asked, hurts the evaluator as well as the candidate. The former can't make a fully informed decision; the latter deals with judgments that are less than fully informed.

ACTION STEPS

If you're a hiring manager, find ways to brief all involved with the interview process on a candidate's written materials. If you're on a search committee or participating in a search, request these materials be shared with you, citing a need to know as much before making a decision as possible.



What Does the Job Description Say?

ANSWER: Let must-haves beat nice-to-haves.

It surfaces in hiring announcements all the time. "An exciting opportunity..." "An energetic candidate..." To be clear, there is no issue with seeking people who will be excited about their work, or ones who will put energy into creating a good experience for themselves and those around them. However, this does affect how we perceive those who responded to such a call. Time and again, I've heard good candidates discounted from jobs they were capable of, and could excel in, because they didn't "seem excited." (more on this in questions 4 + 8)

As you prepare to post a listing for a position, really look at what the job requires, and how those requirements have been listed in the announcement. Think of it in terms of, who could the posting - as listed - be excluding?

An example: an account representative is often advertised for by highlighting a need to reach out to large groups of people, energetically and personably. However, it's also essential in these roles to build strong relationships with individual clients and work to thoughtfully fulfill their needs. **How could your applicant pool be affected by listing both these requirements, rather than the former?**

When job descriptions are being constructed or re-evaluated in preparation for hiring, look at the position objectively. What will the successful candidate need - really need - to have? **How can these needs be framed in a way where skill and ability are considered alongside temperamental factors?** What elements of the role prioritize engagement with people and environment, and which ones prioritize thoughts, ideas, and systems? Cite both for your best chance at well rounded candidates.

ACTION STEPS

Evaluate success in a role from two viewpoints: what tasks will this person complete, and what relationship/environmental impact will their role have? Build a job description based on your answers to these two questions.



How Are Candidates Briefed Pre-Interview?

ANSWER: We all perform better when we get to study.

Imagine being asked to go on a road trip with a friend, committing early to share the driving responsibilities. You've never having been to this city before, but your friend has nothing but good things to say about it. When your shift arrives, you slide into the driver's seat...only to have the GPS die and a friend who can't help get you there.

This is the job interview, when a candidate hasn't been briefed. Interviewers and committee members know the lay of the land; it's unfair to not provide a candidate information to allow them to navigate these new surroundings effectively.

I've spoken with people, who worry that interview questions, interviewer details, and schedules enable "cheating," giving an "unfair advantage" by allowing them to prepare. To that, I respond: **we allow (encourage, even!) students to study ahead of taking tests- tests that will help us determine if they have what they need to move through the course. Job interviews are no different.** Given the opportunity to prepare their answers doesn't mean they'll lie, any more than letting students know what they'll be tested on guarantees that they'll cheat. Further, we place a great deal of weight on questions candidates ask; time to prepare lets them ask insightful and proactive ones.

Successful interviewees are not only able to do what's being asked of them, they're able to manage their energy for the duration of their time with you. **This is true of anyone who you'll interview, but is especially helpful for those actively being drained by the process itself.** Helping candidates become comfortable with your expectations will yield a better picture of who you're hiring.

ACTION STEPS

In pre-interview communication with candidates, provide them with a schedule of the day's events, an idea of who they'll be speaking with, and some things that will be asked of them. This will yield more prepared and productive interviews.

CANDIDATE BRIEF CHECKLIST

By easing the mind of your candidate with a comprehensive pre-interview briefing, you'll allow their minds to dive deep into more pressing matters like their own work history, issues affecting your organization, and how they'll do their best work with you. What should you provide? A short list (that can be added to!) is below.

_____ A schedule of the interview's events

_____ A list of individuals who will be participating in the interview and their roles

_____ A general overview of what sorts of questions a candidate may be asked; this outlines organizational priorities and allows for ample prep

_____ Any relevant details for transportation: address to put in GPS, transit stops, traffic patterns one could anticipate, etc.

_____ Should the individual be meeting with HR, any paperwork or details that department will be asking for

_____ Anticipated decision-making timeline and preferred method for any follow-up communication



What Cues Are You Looking For?

ANSWER: Let's redefine what "excited" looks like.

Judge, Bono, Iles, and Gerhardt (2002) found in their studies that “extroverted employees are significantly more likely to (1) emerge as leaders in selection and promotion decisions, and (2) be perceived as effective by both supervisors and subordinates.” With this in mind, it will be all the more important to reveal your excitement as the situation or topic of conversation calls for it.

-from my The I's Have It

As I alluded to in question #2, many of us go into hiring situations with an idea of what an energetic and enthusiastic candidate will look like. We have deemed eye contact, well-placed listening cues, ease in verbal communication, and unflagging energy the "right" way to assess this. However, for any number of reasons, candidates may be enthusiastic about an opportunity but not display it using these cues. Should they be overlooked for presenting differently?

Rather than assuming that an engaged and enthusiastic candidate should display this affect at all times, instead look for cues in moments where they talk about the beneficiaries of their work, or in areas where they're quite experienced and knowledgeable. Shifting your focus from a blanket show of excitement, to one that shows what elements of the position they'll be most energetic about, could change the way you look at prospective employees.

And remember: competence and excitement are not one and the same! Think not just about who presents well to you in the moment, but who will show up and do the work diligently and effectively each day.

ACTION STEPS

Look for subtle but powerful moments of engagement like insightful questions, note-taking, or extended conversations with interviewers after scheduled time, rather than assessing purely on tone of voice, posture, or eye contact.



How Is the Interview Structured?

ANSWER: Less interrogation, more inquiry.

One of the most powerful tone-setting moments I created when working with student staff, was to tell them to approach the job interview as though it was a conversation and not an interrogation. Many in positions to hire avoid this, thinking it'll lead to grossly informal proceedings. In reality, many will still remain composed in such an environment, but open up and can respond to questions asked of them in more detail and with less hesitation. We should trust prospective employees at all levels to interpret such a change responsibly.

Disclaimers such as "I'll be taking notes during the interview, please feel encouraged to do the same" and "Take your time responding if you can't think of an answer right away" will disarm all candidates who are nervous to perform well, but will be especially appreciated by introverts, who thrive when provided with time to think and respond, and to write as a means of interpreting information provided. This practice, combined with #3 (a proper and comprehensive briefing) will make a world of difference in lowering the perceived stakes, allowing many applicants - inexperienced or apprehensive as well as introverted - to perform better in a high-pressure situation.

Consider, also, the possibility of being able to "show, not tell" in an interview environment. Is there a way to let applicants perform elements of the role they're applying for? This opportunity to do something they may struggle to explain, can show you how they'd look in the role, and provide a means to match their intent with their actual impact. Whether it's a presentation (if the role calls for it), an interaction with a client, or sample brief or communication, this performative element can add more nuance to an otherwise largely speculative process.

ACTION STEPS

Commit to starting each interview with a disarming question about the candidate's day or background. Where you can, provide opportunities for them to show, rather than tell, you what they know or can do.



How Are Interviewers Briefed?

ANSWER: The blind can't hire the blind.

The idea of this resource came about because I realized that priming introverted job candidates for the hiring process did little if their interviewers weren't also prepared to receive them. This mentality should extend well beyond the immediate hiring committee and into anyone who might have (a) contact with prospective employees, or (b) a say in the hiring decision.

How prepared are the individuals who have hiring input? Do they understand the nuance of how candidates might present themselves, and/or why? This speaks not just to temperament, but also communication style, intercultural communication, or even varying expertise? We often assume that people have what they need to be successful in these situations, but inexperience (at best) or hidden bias (at worst) could affect who you bring into your organization.

Introverts aren't the only population that suffers from a perception of what a leader should look like- not by a long shot. Many marginalized populations are shut out of positions for not "looking" the part at an organization. And the nature of intersectionality can mean that the more intricate a person's identity, the less likely they are to break through in an organization where they may stand out (for any number of reasons).

Commit to sharing the details of this ebook (or the ebook itself!) with folks who have a stake in your hiring decisions. But don't stop there. How can you increase awareness of bias or snap judgments in your day-to-day interactions? By talking about these issues openly, and working to combat them once they're uncovered, the face of your organization could start to change.

ACTION STEPS

Carve out time to meet with the individuals who will play a part in hiring. Talk about requirements of the role, any gaps the department may have, and what you need in a candidate- not just what you'd like to have, or what has been there previously.



Do You Adhere to the Timeline?

ANSWER: In this case, the more talking, the better.

As I alluded to in question #2, many go into hiring situations with an idea of what an energetic and enthusiastic candidate will look like. But what we can and should also consider, is how long that energy can be sustained, what we can do to prolong it, and what practices might diminish it.

While we're aware that life can get in the way and unexpected events may prolong the deadlines that we set in good faith to keep in touch with candidates, it's always worth a reminder that on the other side of those application materials and interview notes are living, breathing human beings, whose fate ultimately lies in your hands. Effective search teams use this information carefully and responsibly, communicating openly with candidates as circumstances change.

This is an introverted issue in two ways. The energy burn candidates expend over an interview process is greater than that for an extrovert, because the stimulating environment drains them more than it might their extroverted counterparts, who gain from such stimulation. In the absence of a defined endpoint, they can't shut that proverbial burn down. Consequently, whether you mean to or not, you may present the image of a work environment that will test their temperament unnecessarily. If the search process is truly about mutual fit, it's worth it to consider how delayed or incomplete communication might reflect on your organization.

Commit to offering periodic notification on candidate progress, including when someone has been taken out of consideration for a role. This goes a long way in lessening candidate nervousness and heightening your perception as a desirable organization.

ACTION STEPS

Include in the candidate timeline (see step #3) when you'll be reaching out to update them on your progress- and hold yourself to it! If circumstances change, commit further to keeping candidates in the loop.



How Does Your Firm Define Success?

ANSWER: How can a variety of candidates make you
better and stronger as an organization?

Create space on the team for those [candidates] who aren't always the loudest, and create space in your notion of a [leader] for those who sit back a little longer before they shout. Chances are they will have some great things to say when they eventually speak up.

-from my The I's Have It

There are a great many things that go into our perception of who can and will be successful in a role. And while some of those metrics are justifiable and important - prior experience, rapport with prospective coworkers, understanding of the market and its stakeholders - others are largely ceremonial. To have someone who communicates easily in crowds is important, but to have someone who shines in smaller and more personal environments also has value. The quick decision maker can be an asset, but so too can the deliberate thinker who encourages a team to slow down and consider all sides of an argument. Which of these skills is essential in a given role, and which is just customary or familiar in that role?

I urge any team on the precipice of change (and most teams are, or should prepare to be in the near future) to reconsider what it truly takes to be successful in their group, department, or field. Look beyond the most enthusiastic or polished candidates to ones that can fill gaps on the team. Statistically, due to prior hiring patterns and expectations, these gaps fall in areas of deliberation, "small" communications, and comfort with quiet and solitary work that often breeds innovation. Open your mind, and the minds of your hiring team, to regard these qualities as assets and not weaknesses or challenges to an otherwise boisterous team. You'll be better for it.

ACTION STEPS

Look past team "fit" in hiring decisions, toward team "fill"- as in filling of gaps. What sorts of thinking is your team missing?

What perspectives aren't represented? And what can candidates do to challenge current conventional thinking?

TO SUM UP...

1

Brief all involved with the interview process on a candidate's written materials. If you're on a search committee or participating in a search, request these materials be shared with you.

2

Evaluate success from two viewpoints: what tasks will this person complete, and what relationship/environmental impact will their role have? **Build a job description based on your answers.**

3

Provide candidates with a schedule of the day's events, an idea of who they'll be speaking with, and some things that will be asked of them. This will yield more prepared and productive interviews.

4

Look for subtle but powerful moments of engagement like insightful questions, note-taking, or conversations with interviewers, rather than assessing purely on tone of voice, posture, or eye contact.

5

Commit to starting each interview with a disarming question about the candidate's day or background. Where you can, **provide opportunities for them to show, rather than tell, you what they know or can do.**

6

Meet with individuals who will play a part in hiring. **Talk about requirements of the role, gaps the team may have, + what you need in a candidate-** not just what you'd like or what has been there previously.

7

Include in the candidate timeline when you'll be reaching out to update them on your progress- and hold yourself to it! If circumstances change, commit further to keeping candidates in the loop.

8

Look past team "fit" in hiring decisions, toward team "fill"- as in filling of gaps. What sorts of thinking is your team missing? What perspectives aren't represented? And what can candidates do to challenge current conventional thinking?

FINAL TIPS + FURTHER READING

Hopefully, by this point, you feel prepared to seek out and hire quiet talent for your team. But this is far from the end of the process. To that end, here are a few final tips for how to create a well-oiled machine of a team while accommodating the work needs of all types:

- Start all new hires at an organization with a proper onboarding schedule (that they're prepared for, just as with an interview). Balance the frenzy of new names and faces with time to reflect on their new role and how they hope to make an impact within it.
- Provide ample opportunity for all team members to reflect on their workstyle and their needs and wishes for productive work. Create space where these expectations and needs can be shared.
- Set clear communication expectations about how (and when) people can be best reached, as well as how folks can contribute to departmental discussions. Where possible, allow for written as well as verbal contributions, and provide time both ahead of, and following, crucial moments to reflect. This could yield more nuanced and well thought out contributions from all team members, not just introverts.

This short guide is not equipped to be the end-all, be-all of temperament in the workplace. Luckily for you all, I know of some other resources that will be immeasurably helpful in creating a workplace that values contributions and temperaments of all kinds. Start here for more details:

- [Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking](#) by Susan Cain
- [Quiet Influence: The Introvert's Guide to Making a Difference](#) by Jennifer Kahnweiler
- [Genius of Opposites](#) by Jennifer Kahnweiler
- [The Introvert Advantage](#) by Marti Olson Laney
- [The I's Have It: Reflections on Introversion in Student Affairs](#) (but helpful for all fields of work/study!) by Amma Marfo

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WANT MORE?

Amma is a dynamic and sought-after speaker on topics such as leadership, group dynamics, learning and optimizing the temperament of your organization, cultivating environments that encourage creativity, and incorporating your values into your work and larger goals. She speaks on college and university campuses across the country, at regional and national conferences, and has partnered with organizations like HubSpot, Wayfair, Startup Institute Boston, and General Assembly.

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