

Well-Intentioned Help from Extroverts

I'm wondering if you've had similar experiences. Throughout my forty-eight years, I've had various individuals try to help me improve myself. The problem? As I reflect back on their "help," it had everything to do with me becoming like them, which meant me not being me. I don't think they meant me harm, but rather that they were so convinced that the way they were, extroverted, was the way to be a leader, to be healthy, to be a good person. Why wouldn't we want to help someone become a better person?

We all struggle with this bias, but in differing ways and maybe degrees. I wonder, because of our differences however, if extroverts don't struggle even more than we do. As introverts, we are inclined toward being much more introspective, can be quite self-critical and are actually good at poking holes in things that aren't actually true. Most of us don't have the tendency to take ourselves too seriously. Many of us struggle not so much with pride per se, but with the flip side, feelings of inferiority. This, I'm convinced, is part and parcel of leaning toward introversion. All of that to say that many extroverts genuinely and sincerely think that their view of the world is the way things ought to be. They are confused by our tendency to introspect, to over-analyze, to be troubled by a world that for us displays ample evidence of brokenness. This sense of things not being as they ought to be often leads us toward thoughts and feelings of sadness or anxiety, negative emotions.

They and the culture around them promote happiness as the "good life," the "happy life." If people aren't happy, something is wrong. Thinking too much about the ills of the world (something many of us more introverted people tend to

do), tends to take us away from their ultimate good. So, I think they genuinely want to cheer us up, to help us be more successful, to be more assertive and to take what is ours. They want us to stop being sad, sober or serious and be more light-hearted, fun and happy. In short, with the best of intentions perhaps, they want to make us like them. Maybe we remind them in some way of the reality that all of life is most definitely not happy. Perhaps they don't like the dissonance in them that our presence evokes and seek to reduce it through moving us to their worldview. I think I understand the reasons that they do it.

The reality, however, is that in their attempt to make us whole, they end up telling us that who we are is broken. My contention is that we ought not be trying to make people, of any disposition, into someone they are not. Rather, it seems to me that our aim with those we truly "help" should consist in helping them live out of their own uniqueness and authenticity. For those who have introversion as a part of their internal composition, true help needs to be respectful and reflective of this reality. So, our extroverted friends, bosses and loved ones, we appreciate your attempts to "help" us but please stop "helping" us if that means trying to make us like you. You are potentially "helping" us to death.