

Who Makes the Best Leaders?

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Who makes the best leader? Extroverts? Introverts? It depends. According to a 2011 study, “research now suggests that leading in an introverted manner is a key to success.”¹ Context is everything. This statement, according to Adam Grant, University of Pennsylvania, Francesca Gino, Harvard University, and David Hofmann, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, is true where employees that work for the introverted leader are proactive. What the study actually concluded was that the superior style of leadership varied according to this key organizational metric. For the more proactive employees, introverted leaders lead them to greater results. For the less proactive employees, extroverted leaders do the same. So, if you lead a team of highly proactive employees, rest assured that your strengths as an introverted leader are just what they need to succeed.

Our culture is so extrovert-biased that discussing introvert strengths feels like considering a square circle, an oxymoron. Part of the battle for us as introverts is won in rejecting the cultural stereotypes and misinformation all around us. We have some very definite strengths if we choose to see them through an introverted frame. If good leadership includes the exercise of the following, see how you stack up:

- **Wisdom.**

Wisdom is knowledge rightly applied. It’s practice often includes resisting our impulses and slowing things down to allow us to make wise long-term decisions for the benefit of the team.

- **Deep, Critical Thinking and Analysis.**

We’re wired for this. Our brains move slower and tend to be more analytical than our extroverted teammates. We

are adept at poking holes in ideas that won't prove to be in the best interest of the team. Without our analysis, our teams may make critical mistakes.

- **Logical.**

We tend to be a little suspect of the hype. We tend to be persuaded and to persuade others with sound logic, good factual information and rational argument.

- **Careful Consideration.**

We tend to be risk-averse. This is a helpful quality in leaders. Our cautious nature helps prevent impulsive or foolish decision-making that exposes the organization to risk.

- **Focus.**

I noticed that Daniel Goleman's latest book is entitled Focus. We do this quite naturally. We are typically the ones that are able to continue sustained focus on the project in front of us through completion and culminating in excellent results.

- **Engagement with abstract concepts and ideas.**

We live in our heads and in the world of concepts and ideas. What a wonderful capacity to have as a leader trying to solve abstract and complicated problems.

Any strength overused can become a weakness. All of the above are strengths we introverts tend to possess and abilities we can leverage for the sake of those we lead. The key is to reframe these qualities from supposed weaknesses to the strengths that they are.

How many of the strengths listed above are yours? What other strengths do you have that aren't listed? How can you use these qualities and abilities for the good of your team today? If you're leading a team of highly proactive employees, rest assured that you have exactly what they need to be led toward superior results. Which leader is better? It depends. But in some situations, the introverts have the edge.

leadership advantage: the role of employee proactivity.” Academy of Management Journal, 2011, Vol. 54, No. 3, 528.