

HOW INTROVERTS CAN GET NOTICED

Quiet strengths often go unrewarded. So, how do you speak up to get your talents recognised?

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Do you feel invisible at work, even though you are knocking your own tasks out of the park and invariably finding yourself sorting out other people's disasters? Your ability to get things done without fuss doesn't get you any attention, let alone the public praise you so richly deserve. Yet the "squeaker wheels" around you manage to get all the plaudits.

There are ways to increase your visibility and be noticed in the way you want to be noticed.

YOU'RE QUIET ... AND THAT'S OK

Quiet can be a very powerful foundation for success. Introverts who have made it to the very top of their fields include Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, J.K. Rowling, Barack Obama, Emma Watson, Michael Jordan and Christina Aguilera, to name a few. To start progressing in your chosen career you may need to see yourself and what is possible differently, as quieter, more introverted managers are often held back by the belief they don't have what it takes to move up the leadership ladder.

A study by Susan Cain, author of *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, examined a group of 30 recent entrants to leadership positions who had backgrounds in introspective analyst roles. She found "literally zero per cent" believed that introverts could make good leaders. They did not believe in their own capabilities to succeed in this new phase of their careers.

After Cain worked with them, most were able to see themselves as leaders for the first time in their lives, unburdened by the limiting assumption that attached to their introversion.

BUT TOO QUIET? DEFINITELY NOT OK

A narrow and passive form of quiet will do you no favours at all. If you're seen as outstandingly solid in the backroom you won't be part of the foreground, where the action is. You may be overlooked for juicier projects or bypassed for promotion opportunities, all the while remaining a safe, reliable pair of hands.

Are safe, reliable and similarly passive adjectives your signature strengths? Are they what you wish to be known for? If you feel you are being cornered into an area you don't want to stay in, then it's time to reclaim control in a



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way that gets you noticed, in a way you want to be noticed. Here are some ideas to consider:

1. BE A SQUEAKIER WHEEL

If you have been rescuing situations and quietly punching above your weight, then you have also been building a bank of goodwill. This "credit" can give you licence to make forays into the squeaker wheel club.

An up-and-coming executive coaching client observed that in her organisation it was the squeaky wheels who got all the attention. Rather than remaining an observer of this phenomenon, she made a conscious effort to be squeaker herself. Instead of passively accepting directives she did not agree with, she began to state her case assertively on matters ranging from staff resourcing to bonuses.

Because she had "credit in the bank", her senior management audience did listen – intently. Their receptiveness and positive responses to her requests surprised her, and her reputation and self-image began to be seen as courageously authentic. Squeakiness can be worth it, if your foundation is strong.

2. JOIN THE CONVERSATION

While a blab-fest can be difficult for an introvert to enter, the ideas you reveal can help change others' perceptions of you.

As Susan Cain observes: "There's zero correlation between being the best talker and having the best ideas." While extroverts can often have no problem thinking aloud and broadcasting ideas that aren't yet fully formed, introverts are less likely to speak and may be reluctant to reveal their killer idea.

Releasing the ideas you have been incubating can move you from passive observer to a participant on the stage where leadership potential is demonstrated.

Your entry to this main game will be noticed. Be mindful of the fact that dialogue is a two-way street: rather than just downloading your brilliance, also be curious and exploratory in the conversations that emerge. How others experience you in such situations will be influential to the changes you wish to initiate.

3. START WRITING YOUR TUNE

When you're more out there and in the mix, you have an opportunity to change the way

people think about you. Here are three ways to get your message across:

- Try not to be self-deprecating: humility can be a noble leadership virtue, but temper it during your brand-building phase. If you have a habit of telling colleagues that, for example, you're not good with numbers or not a big-picture person, then turn off that flow. You are probably overstating your limitations to a far greater extent than the squeaker wheels around you.

- Take a position with your ideas: don't caveat your ideas with, "I may be wrong, but ..." because this may also limit the way that others see you.

Executive presence expert Muriel Maignan Wilkins says that using more decisive words can be a key means for emerging leaders to show up as more credible, and demonstrate their potential for higher leadership.

Reveal your bigger ideas with the assertiveness they deserve. And, rather than preparing to be defensive, explore disagreements by talking to others.

- Communicate the personal message you want heard: what do you want to be known for, or to do more of, in your role? Whether it's more involvement in social media strategy, mentoring junior staff, or creative problem solving, let people know.

Think of yourself as the master of your own advertising campaign and remember that any campaign requires a certain number of mentions or exposures before the intended message sinks in. Stick at it.

4. GET SUPPORT

Experimenting in the frontiers you are entering may produce mixed early results but don't retreat to old behaviours. Find support outside your department, or company, by reconnecting with a mentor who knows your style, or seeking out the services of an independent executive coach, to help you stay on track. Comfort zones can be difficult to leave behind!

NOW, GO FOR IT

Safe and reliable are pleasant enough qualities but are they enough, for you? If not, start writing your own tune and see where it takes you.