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Mayrene
Bates
Guest
Column

Are you an extrovert or introvert?

By **Mayrene Bates**

The dictionary defines an extrovert as an outgoing, overtly expressive person and someone concerned with external things or objectives. Whereas, an introvert is defined as a shy, reticent and typically self-centered individual or one predominantly concerned with their own thoughts and feelings rather than external things.

As one writer put it, living as an introvert reveals a form of anxiety characterized by undiluted behavior and fear of social judgment and may avoid social situations, even things they would like to participate in. Others, like actress Greta Garbo, simply wanted to be left alone; whereas, extroverts, like former president Bill Clinton, drew energy from mingling with large crowds.

“Our culture expects people to be outgoing and sociable,” writes author Christopher Lane in his book, “Shyness: How Normal Behavior Became a Sickness.” But, he adds, introverts tend to be better listeners and also find it easier to spend longer periods doing solitary work; hence, the scientists and researchers of the world. But Jennifer Kahn, author of the “Introverted Leader,” writes that introverted leaders are more common than we think.

One writer includes the following people on his introvert list: Moses, religious leader; Hillary Clinton, secretary of state; Manmohan Singh, prime minister; Warren Buffett, magnate; Bill Gates, CEO, philanthropist; Joe DiMaggio, member of the baseball Hall of Fame; Mother Teresa, nun, missionary; and Mohatma Gandhi, revolutionary.

I admit that I considered myself an introvert for many years, certainly all through my elementary, high school and college years, but I don't think that I fit the dictionary's definition of an introvert today. And, I was never shy about raising my hand to respond in class. Still, I considered myself shy and believed others were much smarter than I.

Then I married my military guy and moved about every three years. We went to Morocco, North Africa, to a small U.S. Air Force base 90 miles from Casablanca. I joined the officers wives club, attended all of their events, went to parties at the officers club every Saturday night to socialize and dance until the wee hours of the morning.

The Air Force became integrated only a few years before that, and as I remember had only three African-American officers on the entire base. Only two of them, including us, had their families with them. We remained in Morocco on the same base for four years. I discovered during those years that I wasn't nearly as introverted as I'd imagined.

One author contends how difficult it must be to live in America as an introvert with our “loud, braggadocios and talkative society.” The author goes on to say that we tend to depict our extroverts right up there with attractiveness,

low cholesterol, frequent exercise and good health. He puts the following people on his list of extroverts: Muhammad Ali, boxer; Bill Clinton, president; Steve Jobs, innovator; Winston Churchill, politician; George W. Bush, president; Margaret Thatcher, prime minister; Boris Yeltsin, president; and Marie Antoinette, queen.

Dr. Mehmet Oz, a popular TV doctor, in his article “Charms of the Quiet Child,” writes that most parents want their children to be assertive, bold and brave; whereas, the quiet child, many times, has no cheerleaders at all. He goes on to talk about the quiet, deep thinkers like Jonas Salk and Marie Curie: “They didn’t spend a lot of time in the club scene.” Yet, Oz notes, they may never have achieved the things they accomplished if they had been without quiet focus.


He notes that’s why it’s so important to encourage and be supportive of the shy ones, because the shy one could turn out to be a Marie Curie or Bill Gates. Who knows? “It’s up to us as adults to mentor the introvert equally well as we do the extroverts who wow us.”

“It may be the time for America to learn the forgotten rewards of sitting down and shutting up,” writes author Susan Cain in her book “Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can’t Stop Talking,” (or tweeting, I might add). She goes on to write that “there’s a subtle bias against introverts and it’s generating a waste of talent, energy and happiness.”

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