

Supervising Introverts: 5 Tips for Managers

Bill Gates ... Warren Buffett ... Condoleezza Rice. All great leaders. All introverts.



Introverts may be less noisy, but they actually outnumber extroverts in the workplace. Even in the corner office, a full 40% of high-level executives describe themselves as introverts.

Introversion is not shyness. It's a hard-wired personality type. Introverts process information internally. They focus on depth, favor one-on-one interaction and seek solitude to gain perspective. They think first, talk later.

But in today's extroverted business world, introverts can sometimes feel overlooked, excluded and misunderstood. And that can be a particular challenge for managers, especially managers who are extroverts.

Jennifer Kahnweiler, Ph.D., author of the groundbreaking book, *The Introverted Leader*, suggests managers follow these five tips for supervising their introverted employees: (Note: Jennifer will host a [special webinar](#) on this topic on Oct. 2.)

1. Chill out. In meetings, conversations, and even casual chats, slow down and give your introverts time to reflect and respond. Put space between your questions — counting "1...2...3" in your head if you have to — and avoid what most introverts perceive as a cross-examination. One extroverted manager posts a reminder next to his phone: "Shut up and listen."

2. Give the gift of solitude. Introverts need alone time. As a manager, refrain from judging this need, and do what it takes to honor it instead. One simple technique: Rather than stopping by throughout the workday, bundle your non-priority items and schedule a single conversation.

3. Write more, converse less. Accommodate your introverts' preference for writing over conversation. Instead of picking up the phone or showing up unannounced at their desks, communicate through e-mail or online chats whenever possible.

4. Pass the megaphone. Encourage balanced participation in meetings, and help introverts prepare. Ask for agenda items in advance, assign pre-work, and agree on a system that invites everyone to be heard. Kahnweiler says that one group she works with distributes 10 tokens to each team member at the start of a meeting. When someone speaks, he or she gives up a token. The idea: No tokens, no talking.

5. Allow them time to prepare. Provide an agenda for meetings so introverts can bring their best thinking.

Give them a heads up about what you want them to contribute. Whenever possible, provide your questions for one-on-one sessions in advance. This will also focus the discussion and force you both to be more productive.