

## "AHA!" THE INTROVERT EPIPHANY AND MORE

by Valerie Lankford



For years, I was aware of the personality types introvert and extrovert, but I did not focus on these differences among the clients in my private practice. Now I do! The results have been eye-opening.

What changed? Well, within the last year, I happened upon a book by Marti Olsen Laney, Psy.D., titled *The Introvert Advantage: How to Thrive in an Extrovert World*. Although it was published nearly a decade ago, I had not heard others speak of it. The picture on the cover is of an eggshell cracked open with the words, "Making the Most of Your Hidden Strengths." I skimmed it and began lending out my copy, then started buying more copies to lend. Introverts in my practice came back to me sharing their "Aha!" experiences from reading it, saying things such as "I felt like it was being written about me," or "I saw myself in so many pages of that book!" I had never heard such Free Child ego state exclamations from these folks. They continued to express being validated, understood, and appreciated, rather than feeling ashamed or inadequate for needing more down time between social encounters than many of their friends or family.

As an extrovert on the extreme end of the scale, I was so very excited by my clients' reaction that, in many cases, I began incorporating an introvert/extrovert "Quickie Quiz" and self-assessment from the book as part of my intake process. These tools complemented my TA materials, which include the Script Checklist, the Transactional Checklist, and Houck's Injunction Inventory.

I sometimes emphasize that understanding our spouse's or other family members' introversion, in particular, can help strengthen our relationships. For instance, an extroverted client realized that he, as an only child, had been raised by two introverted parents, who did not teach him social skills or provide many opportunities for socializing. He is now catching up, learning these skills and gaining confidence with his peers. In addition, he is no longer blaming himself for the social mistakes he has made, and he has become more comfortable accepting his parents' strengths and weaknesses. As Eric Berne theorized, people often play psychological games when their needs are not being met. In this case, my client was able to stop playing the Victim role and has begun to "get on with it."

Understanding the typical feelings of introverts can also help clients reduce stress in the workplace. For example, one client spent several sessions telling me about his self-consciousness and feelings of inadequacy. Then I introduced *The Introvert Advantage*, and gradually, he became more confident with his own introverted style. He

began focusing on his ability to listen attentively, ask thought-provoking questions, and encourage others to "do it their own way, not necessarily his way." Over time, he stopped discounting what people were telling him and genuinely believed the praise he received from colleagues, actually took in the strokes, and grew into a well-respected leader. Now he's being identified for a promotion. Several other introverts in my practice are actually surprising me with how much positive recognition they've been getting at work, now that they've embraced their strengths.

Focusing on introverts and extroverts has brought insights to my personal life as well. I have been married for many years to an introvert. Our son is an introvert and is publishing his second book as a young professor. Our daughter is more in the middle of the introvert/extrovert scale. She has participated in several week-long silent retreats at a site that offers hiking opportunities and nightly lectures without verbal participation from the audience. All three of these family members are terrific editors for my writing! They offer wonderful, relevant questions and are good listeners. Also, the introvert awareness has helped us all to accept our differences and build on our strengths. I believe the aspects of a healthy script are more achievable with this new appreciation. We blend our strengths, giving importance to each of our different styles; this means both process (how we think about stuff and how we relate to each other) and the content we work on together. I see the improved results accomplished by our teamwork: first we offer feedback, then we "chew on the material," before joining up again for the "next round" of collaboration. Yippee for the introvert/extrovert advantages!

My renewed interest in introverts has also coincided with the 2012 release of Susan Cain's book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*. A major commercial success, this book has been critically acclaimed and translated into 20 languages. As an introvert herself, Ms. Cain took seven years preparing to speak publicly on the subject, and eventually gave a wonderful "Ted Talk" sharing the significance of her work. I encourage interested readers to check it out.

A video of her talk is available online here, or by searching for the keywords "ted talk susan cain": [http://www.ted.com/talks/susan\\_cain\\_the\\_power\\_of\\_introverts.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/susan_cain_the_power_of_introverts.html).

For you introverts out there, this means you can enjoy what she says from the comfort of your own computer. For you extroverts, maybe it's time to starting spreading the word. "Vive la différence!"

Valerie Lankford is a C.T.M. and L.C.P.C. who lives and works in the Baltimore, Maryland area. She can be contacted at [valerielankford@yahoo.com](mailto:valerielankford@yahoo.com).