

Chapter 1

Introverted? Good for You!

In This Chapter

- ▶ Spotting the differences between introverts and extroverts
 - ▶ Valuing the talents and assets of innies
 - ▶ Identifying the challenges of being an introvert in an extrovert's world
 - ▶ Knowing the five basics for succeeding as an introvert
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Does the following sound like you? You're happier reading a book than going to a dinner party. You love your friends, but you treasure your moments alone. And you'd rather eat nails than attend a corporate team-building event.

If any of these ring a bell, I'm guessing you're an introvert. And what's more, I'm guessing that your extroverted friends don't understand you *at all*.

Oh, sure, these people love you. But they don't get why noisy team meetings and brainstorming sessions wear you out. They can't figure out why you prefer hiking or puttering in your kitchen to singing karaoke in a crowded bar. And above all, many of them think they can (and should) change you.

Well, here's the truth: If you're introverted, odds are you're hard-wired that way. You can be wildly successful in a world that's largely geared for extroverts — and, in fact, that's what this book is all about. But deep down inside, you'll always be exactly what you are: an introvert. And as I explain shortly, that's a very, very good thing!

But before I talk about why introverts totally rock, I need to explain just what an introvert is. And to talk about that, I need to talk about extroverts as well.

How Introverts and Extroverts Differ

Did you ever wonder why your extroverted friends think and behave so differently from you? I explain why in this section, and I also look at a wide variety of behaviors that distinguish innies from outies.

The biggest difference between introverts and extroverts

The first thing to know about introverts and extroverts is that they charge their batteries in different ways.

For extroverts, being in the middle of a crowd of people is energizing. They can talk for hours and come away feeling refreshed and invigorated. So they surround themselves with friends and family, and they can't wait to meet even more people and try even more activities. For them, walking into a room full of strangers is like taking a shot of a high-caffeine energy drink.

If you're an introvert, this behavior is hard for you to understand. It's not that you dislike people. In fact, you truly enjoy them; however, you enjoy them in small doses. You love meeting a good friend for lunch or hanging out with close family members on the weekend. But making endless small talk at a party filled with strangers doesn't energize you. In fact, it does just the opposite: It drains you, and you can't wait to recharge your batteries with a quiet walk, an evening at home with your family, or a good book.

Other ways introverts are different from extroverts

Because introverts look inward and extroverts look outward, they respond very differently to the world around them. If you're an introvert, here are some of the ways you're unlike your extroverted friends:

- ✓ You generally think before you talk, while outies tend to say whatever comes to mind.
- ✓ You like to focus deeply on a few interests, while extroverts tend to explore a lot of activities more superficially.
- ✓ You probably like texting or e-mailing people, while extroverts enjoy phone calls or face-to-face meetings.

What's the ratio of introverts to extroverts?

Estimates vary widely, but many experts believe that about 30 percent of people are introverts. Some estimates run as low as 25 percent, while others are as high as 50 percent.

But just for the record, not everyone is an introvert or an extrovert. Many people are *ambiverts*, which means they land in the middle of the introvert-extrovert spectrum and can fit comfortably into either world.

- ✔ You may find multitasking stressful, while extroverts are usually pretty good at it.
- ✔ You likely weigh risks more carefully than an extrovert.
- ✔ You have a few very deep friendships rather than a lot of casual acquaintances.
- ✔ You tend to dress in colors and act in ways that help you blend in rather than stand out.

People often attribute a lot of other behaviors to introverts, but some of these behaviors actually stem from two other traits: shyness and sensitivity. In Chapter 2, you can test yourself to see whether you're introverted, shy, or sensitive — or a combination of these three.

Why Being an Introvert Is Cool

Because you're very different from your outgoing friends, it's all too easy to think that something's wrong with you. And it's even easier to feel like an oddball if you're surrounded by social butterflies who tease you about being a "loner" or a "party pooper." (I talk more about this in Chapter 14.)



But here's the most important message of this entire book: Innies and outies are equally great. The world needs both, and smart people recognize this fact. So does Mother Nature, who has good reasons for wiring innies and outies in different ways biologically (see Chapter 3).

And here's another fact: As an introvert, you're amazing! You're likely to be a loyal friend, a creative and independent thinker, and a true scholar — and you can also be a natural-born leader. The following sections give you a closer look at why you're so terrific.

Introverts are great friends

An extrovert can walk into a room full of strangers and walk out a few hours later with five new best buddies. If you're an introvert, on the other hand, making new friends is a challenge (which I address in Chapter 11). So at first glance, it sounds like your outgoing friends have the advantage here.

But what happens when you do make a new friend? That's where you clearly shine.

First of all, you're as loyal as they come. Because you work hard for each friendship, you highly value your relationships. You're likely to be forgiving when disputes arise, and you'll probably never dump a friend for someone who's more trendy or interesting. For you, a friendship lasts for life, and any time a friend needs your help, you'll give your all.

And here's another area in which you excel as a buddy: You're a listener, not a talker. So if your friends come to you with their problems, you'll be happy to let them vent (as long as they don't go on forever!). In fact, your friends may be more likely to open up to you than they are to bare their souls to their extroverted friends. That's because they know you're sensitive, you're thoughtful, and you'll keep their secrets safely tucked away.

Want another pat on the back? As a quiet innie, you're not a drama queen or a spotlight-stealer. That guy arguing loudly with his girlfriend at a restaurant? Not you. That woman showing off her belly-dancing skills at your company's holiday party? Nope, not you either. Because you hate making a scene, your friends know you'll never embarrass them in public.

Introverts are creative

What do movie star Michelle Pfeiffer, *Star Wars* director Steven Spielberg, and Harry Potter creator J. K. Rowling have in common? All three of them are introverts. So is Apple cofounder Steve Wozniak, who invented the first Apple computer all by himself.

Of course, there are plenty of creative extroverts, too. (For example, it's a good bet that Snoop Dogg doesn't have an introverted bone in his body!) But the credit for many of the world's greatest paintings, books, symphonies, and scientific ideas and inventions goes to introverts.

One reason that introverts are good at translating creative ideas into reality is that they're able to work hard for long periods of time. Unlike outies, they don't need to stop every couple of hours and call a friend to recharge their batteries.

Also, introverts are independent thinkers. That means they're less likely to go along with the crowd and more likely to come up with new and novel ideas. In a team-oriented world, this tendency can make life difficult for them (something I talk about in Chapter 4), but it also gives them the power to come up with brilliant ideas like the light bulb and $E = MC^2$.

And finally, while outies are frequently out partying, innies tend to spend a lot of time delving deeply into the topics that interest them. As a result, they're building the knowledge base they need to translate their creative ideas into reality. For example, one study measuring college students' knowledge about 20 wide-ranging topics found that the introverts knew more about every single topic than the extroverts did.

Introverts are natural leaders

In Chapters 5 and 6, I talk about the introverted traits that can translate into powerful leadership skills, including a willingness to let other people shine and a talent for gathering facts and doing research. In addition to propelling many introverts to the top of the leadership chain, these traits can also help you shine as an entrepreneur — especially if you center your marketing

approach around them (something I talk about in Chapter 10). And they can also help you climb the corporate ladder by using a technique called *managing up*. (You can find out all about this in Chapter 8).

Introverts are studious

Are you an introvert who's really smart or even gifted? If so, you have a lot of company. Fifty percent of gifted children are introverts, and three-quarters of the "super-gifted" — those with IQs above 160 — are innies.

Overall, introverts and extroverts are equally smart. But even when their IQs are comparable, introverts are more likely to do well in college and to get graduate degrees.

What's the reason for this? My guess is that because introverts enjoy the life of the mind, learning and studying come more naturally to them. They're also able to focus longer and more intently on complex material.

In addition, introverts may be better at delaying gratification. (In Chapter 3, I explain why they appear to have a biological advantage here.) So when they're facing a choice like "Should I study for tomorrow's final or go to a party?" they're more likely than extroverts to make the sensible decision.

If Being an Introvert Is So Great, What's the Problem?

If you're an introvert, I hope you're feeling pretty good about yourself by now. As you can see, you don't need to be "fixed," because you're perfectly fine as you are. In fact, a world without introverts like you would be a pretty awful place! We wouldn't have Charlotte Brontë's books, Emily Dickinson's poems, or Beethoven's music. And if extroverts didn't have introverts to put the brakes on, their meetings may simply never end — ever. (Shudder.)

But — you knew there was a *but*, didn't you? — psychologists like me talk about *goodness of fit*, which means that it's easiest to succeed in life when

your personality and your environment match well. And here's where things can get a little tricky for you as an introvert.

You see, if introverts made the rules, you'd live in a perfect world. You'd have your own private office at work. Holiday parties would be short and small. Neighbors would always call before dropping by. Family events would be optional, all-day office meetings would be illegal, and team-building events would be punishable by death.



But in the real world, extroverts seem to be running the show, which means they get to call the shots. So you're likely to wind up in a jam-packed open office with a boss whose chief concern is, "Are you a team player?" Your job may require you to do things that introverts hate, such as give speeches (which I discuss in Chapter 7). Your friends and family members will be miffed if you miss a single wedding, birthday bash, or baby shower (see Chapter 13 for how to handle these). And job interviewers will expect you to answer rapid-fire questions instead of giving you the time you need to think (I discuss this in Chapter 9).

For introverted children, still more problems occur. Today's noisy classrooms focus on group activities, and bright innie kids often get lower grades just because they don't like to speak up.

And then, of course, there's the world of romance, which I discuss in Chapter 12. Dating can be a big challenge for introverts, who hate the bar scene and crave the kind of real, old-fashioned intimacy that's rare these days.

Thriving in an Extroverted World

Clearly, your world isn't custom-tailored to you as an introvert. So the big question is, can you still succeed in it? Luckily, as you'll see in these pages, the answer is a resounding "yes." Of course, it'll take some work, but as an introvert who's good at reasoning, planning, and tackling big projects, you're the perfect person for the job!

As you read this book, you'll find hundreds of tips for getting ahead in a world geared for extroverts. You'll get the most from these tips if you keep these five underlying principles for introverted success in mind:

- ✓ **You have the right to be yourself.** Introversion is normal and healthy, just like extroversion. It would be a boring world if we all felt and behaved the same way, so don't think that you *or* your introverted friends need to change your inner selves. Instead, focus on ways in which you can complement each other.

