

# A INTROVERT'S GUIDE TO EXTROVERTING

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*Note to the reader: Being an introvert, being shy, and having social anxiety are all different reasons for wanting to improve your communication skills and show your value in the workplace. You don't need to "fix" being an introvert. The topics and exercises in this book can be used by virtually anyone, and are customizable to your goals and areas for growth. This book is not medical advice.*

Be proud of yourself for taking the first step toward improving your communication skills. This eBook gives a general overview of some of the skills and exercises used in my program Communications Coaching for Introverts. The steps in this book don't necessarily have to be completed in order, and not every tool in the tool-box will be useful to every reader, but many basic communication improvement plans can be made using the information provided.

Working to improve an aspect of your life shouldn't be done in a bubble. Your improvement in communication, interpersonal skills, and professional development should be planned in the context of the whole person. I will occasionally touch on subjects like spiritual, and physical well-being but that is not the focus of this book. Physical health, or lack of it can certainly affect your ability to reach your goals and dedicate energy to them. We will look at aspects of perspective that can be affected by mental and emotional health issues. Poor mental health can impair your ability to take a clear perspective; this book is not a replacement for therapy. Even if you are unsure of where you want to spend your energy first, this process will help you clarify your goals and realize your motivation.

There are potential barriers that could prevent you from getting the most from this book. Surrounding yourself with unhealthy relationships like people who discourage or demean you, and are controlling or abusive will slow or prevent you from achieving your goals. Setting healthy boundaries or explaining your expectations can help you set aside energy for your growth. Constructive criticism is very valuable and can be shared by close connections but people who are always negative and are not invested in helping you grow will take energy away from your motivation. Before moving forward

please consider who drains your energy and who recharges you and prioritize your time accordingly.

Next - look at yourself. Does your internal dialogue put you down? Does it encourage you or overreact to inconveniences? This chapter will help you identify internal barriers like negative self-talk, lack of focus, and intense emotions such as frustration and anxiety and arm you with strategies to address them.

## Emotions

One barrier to following through on your goals is intense negative emotions. You may already be aware of some situations that “set you off” and you may know why - it might even be justified, but it will continue to drain energy away from achieving your goals until you address it. When we feel intense emotions, they usually follow a wave. Later we will address the moments after the wave but we will stay in this moment for now. Something triggers the emotional response, our emotions can quickly escalate and usually, they quickly deescalate. When you feel the intense emotion coming on you can remind yourself there will be a wave of emotion, you expect it to increase in intensity and you know it will then decrease. Just because you feel an intense emotion does not mean you need to act on it, in fact, you probably already know that decisions made during heightened emotional states are often not the best decisions we make. During these intense emotional episodes, it can be helpful to name the emotion. Do you feel anger, sadness, jealousy? You can acknowledge the emotion, but I want you to use language that doesn't identify with the emotion. Instead of “I am angry” say “I notice the emotion of anger.” The first phrase defines you as the emotion, it controls you. The second phrase makes you an observer.

What happens next is important. When we notice we are approaching the end of the wave coming down from the peak, we can continue to remain in that calmer state or we can have a secondary emotion begin. An example would be if you get angry at something small, and then you feel guilt or shame because you lost your temper so

easily. It's important to use our skills of recognizing the wave, refraining from making decisions in the emotional state, and naming the emotion with neutral language. If we don't, the secondary emotion can last much longer and continue taking energy away from achieving our goals. While it might be true that our emotional response was irrational, becoming less reactive can take a lot of work, in the moment we don't judge ourselves for having the emotion. We simply observe it and realize it is there until the wave passes.

There are a lot of strategies to deal with emotions; they're often called coping skills and you probably have several already. A really easy one that most people can do at any time, is taking a walk to distract themselves from the event that triggered the emotion until they can calm down. Depending on what you enjoy, any physical activity from stretching to knitting can help. Most of us have at least heard of breathing exercises but have you considered blowing bubbles? Meditation and prayer are two coping strategies that look different person-to-person but can be effective once you find the right fit. You can see how coping can be different for everyone. I am not very creative but painting and drawing or playing an instrument might be the key to helping other people deal with stress. Some people cause stress, but you may have people in your life that can listen when you need someone to talk to, or who can make you laugh. You can volunteer just to be around others. Whatever the coping strategy you choose, it is important that you aren't using it to avoid the problem. Avoidance is a negative coping strategy like taking drugs or alcohol.

Fear of failure is a pretty common emotional barrier so I'll address it directly.

Perfectionists can be paralyzed by the fear of not living up to their own expectations and might never attempt to achieve the goal in the first place. In most instances when you consider "what's the worst that could happen?" it really isn't that bad. And before you start thinking about how it's a waste of time, effort, money etc. if you don't achieve a stated goal, consider that the experience is a gain. First attempts can be considered "proof of concept" exercises. If it doesn't work, you know you need a different strategy to achieve the goal. It's easy to feel impatient when you are motivated and put effort in and

it doesn't come out the way you hoped, but you can pull a positive lesson out of almost any experience and make it worthwhile. If this is a particularly tough barrier for you, Try setting a low bar like working on the project for 15 minutes every day. That easy accomplishment will get you on a "streak" and creates emotional momentum because you have a little success every day when you achieve the small step.

Addressing intense emotions gave us a skill for battling negative self-talk. During the intense emotion, we identify the emotion and use the language of an observer, rather than identifying with the emotion. We can use this approach in other areas too. When we talk to ourselves inside our head (most people do), some of us are unkind or downright bullies. While we don't control other people, we do have significant influence over what we allow our mind to focus on (thoughts) and our perspective. I am not a proponent of unmitigated positivity but I realize that there are times when the emotional impact of an experience has a disproportionate effect on my perspective for future situations. One way to mitigate those disproportionate effects is to reframe. Our thoughts happen before an emotion, so changing the thought can help us manage the emotion that follows. I had a job where I had to get up really early to drive in. I am a morning person but this was REALLY early. I reminded myself that getting to work early I avoided traffic, and could work a couple of hours before anyone tried calling me. I changed my perspective by framing the situation with the positive elements.

## Negative self-talk

Having your own internal voice telling you you're stupid or not good enough or that you're unlikable is another barrier to achieving your goals. If this is something you experience you may benefit from having a counselor help you with tactics to overcome low self-esteem or processing some emotions, but for now, we will talk about some tools we can use to improve our self-talk on our own.

To use the neutral language of the observer to counter negative self-talk, you will offer a rebuttal to your internal bully. If your internal dialogue tells you you're stupid, you can probably come up with examples of your education or achievements that prove it wrong.

These achievements don't need to be academic; they can simply be the ability to find the best deal, put together a cute outfit, or some other tasks that requires thinking through a process. You will challenge the negative thought with something more rational, or that looks toward the future in a more positive light.

I recommend keeping a Brag Book to anyone who has a boss. You don't need to have low self-esteem, or negative self-talk to benefit, but those are good reasons to have a Brag Book too. From day one of a new job, you keep a list of all the training you attended, projects, achievements, professional certifications, or continuing education. I also put dates in my brag book for work. If this is more personal, perhaps you keep a calendar and every day or every week you list an accomplishment or strength. If you had a cranky customer and you were able to calm them down you might mention great customer service, problem-solving, and communication, perhaps you save the company from losing a paying customer or found a glitch in the software that needs to be addressed. Identify the strength then write a quick blurb about the example proving it. This will be useful during your review at work, and in shutting down the negative self-talk barrier.

## Motivation, Promises to yourself

We might talk to our support system to help create our lists of strengths and accomplishments, we might call a friend when we need to combat negative self-talk or feel in a slump. The people close to us we feel we can trust or to some degree, a community in general, is a resource. If you are launching a business, training for a marathon, quitting smoking, or nearly any other goal, the people around you can influence your decisions and motivation. Have you ever been on a team where a coach told you that you were terrible or had a bad boss who always put you down? Having someone encouraging and supportive makes the challenge easier to tackle! Not everyone is fortunate enough to have a large support system. It's ok to have a small group or connect with a support group of like-minded people. You can also develop a larger network with improved communication skills. Take inventory of these resources

so that when you feel stuck in your progress you can reach out. You will inform these folks about your goals (once you set them) so they can help you with accountability. You can advise them how often you'd like them to check in or ask for help in other ways. This is probably the most important inventory you will take, but you can also list other resources, like a spouse who is willing to take over a responsibility so you have time for homework, or a boss who is flexible with scheduling. This list can remind you of all the reasons you CAN do it when you are feeling overwhelmed.

Some people set goals not for the sake of the goal, but because of what it allows them to do. People who flip houses might not have a passion for renovation work, but if it allows them more time flexibility it is worth it to them. I might argue that time independence is the goal and flipping houses for a profit is the strategy but the process for setting goals can be used for setting incremental goals in a strategy so it's less important what we call it. You might set a goal of a higher-paying job but it's so you can move your family to a safer part of town, or afford the hobby your kid wants to have. All of these things can help motivate you. I can't tell you what motivates you, there is plenty of research on motivation theory if you need, but most adults have a sense of some things that motivate them.

## Goal setting

There are plenty of people who will tell you about setting goals; a 5-year plan, a 50-year plan, or 30 days to change a habit. Most approaches have some kind of value but the most important advice I've ever received was that you need to break any goal into steps. I spent a large part of my adult life avoiding big goals because they seemed insurmountable when I looked at them as big goals and I'm not especially patient with myself to break them down into smaller steps. My "get it done" personality eventually won over my impatience and I started taking things one step at a time.

The second most important thing I've learned about goals is that changing them is ok. This can be particularly relevant to timelines. If your goal was interrupted by a family

event, you may have chosen to support the people you love and put a professional goal on the back burner. Your financial goals may have taken a few steps back when a pandemic affected virtually every aspect of your life. Side-stepping is not an appropriate response to being intimidated by a big goal. But don't give up because the plan didn't work out exactly as you expected.

A common set of parameters for goal setting is SMART.

### Smart Goals

I think of S-M-A-R-T as a colander for setting goals. You can create all kinds of goals without limits of whatever you can imagine, then the SMART colander only lets the goals through if they meet each of the requirements. You can re-write and adjust goals, so they meet the requirements and SMART has saved you time and possible heartache by avoiding vague or impossible goals. It helps you define what success will look like, so you know where you're going and you know when you've gotten there. There are some things about SMART goals that I think are a good starting point but I don't see it as the perfect strategy.

The most important part is relevance. Are the steps you're completing, is the direction you're going, taking you to happiness or a better life? If not, why are you following that map? Does this goal align with your personal values and help you live them in action?

S- Specific- Can you define what you are trying to achieve, paint a picture of the end result? I believe goals can change and should change if what you want changes, but if the adjusted goal is still specific enough to define, this is an important part of a goal.

M-Measurable- Can you quantify so that you know you are making progress in the right direction and know your map is really taking you where you want to go? Just because you are active doesn't mean you are moving forward.

A-Attainable- Is this goal a possibility? This is one area I would use caution. Many people with self-limiting beliefs might not aim for the stars because they don't think it's possible. Consider if the goal CAN be achieved, rather than if you believe in yourself enough to achieve it.



R-Relevant- Does your goal relate to where you want to go in life? Are you setting a goal of making more money or buying a mansion because you want other people to be impressed or does your goal actually point toward your happiness?

T-Time- Can you put a timeline on it? Another one that can change, just because you have a setback doesn't mean you failed. You shouldn't give up on progress because it didn't happen on time.

One of my earliest goals out of undergrad was to work for a specific pharmaceutical company. I thought there was no chance, but I applied and got the job, and enjoyed it for years. Eventually, I saw people who made a lot of money and felt "stuck" because they wouldn't make that kind of income somewhere else, but they also didn't like their job. I spent about a year considering options like teaching English abroad, the Peace Corps, and graduate school. I decided on grad school and it was tough going back to being a poor college kid. That temporary sacrifice paid off with more fulfilling work. While my income is not where it would be if I had stayed in pharmaceuticals, all my needs are met. The desire for making money and working at a specific company changed, so my goal changed. I drew a bigger picture of what I wanted to set as a real goal. The specific career path seemed like a goal, but it was actually a strategy to try and get things like financial independence, and self-confidence. It helped with that for sure, but when I prioritized meaningful work as a goal, I changed strategies. My old strategy wasn't getting me there, which is a perfectly good time to change. Not all changes need to be so dramatic. You're likely to fine-tune your goal and strategy, and if you're considering a big change, talk to other people, consider as many options as you can, and do your research.

As we begin setting goals, I want to go through some short exercises. Just get a piece of paper or open a blank document to jot some things down. When I'm tempted to react to something or someone, I try to imagine how someone I admire would react. It's not a literal person because people have flaws- this is an image of myself, if this alter ego was someone I admire, I consider how she would react. Living up to this version of yourself is tough, but it helps to prevent the emotions from making quick decisions that

have long-term consequences. Consider what it is you would admire about this perfect, admirable version of yourself and take a few notes about them. Thinking from this point of view will help you choose goals that are good for you and others.

The other exercise may help if you had difficulty with the last one. If you struggled to create an admirable version of yourself, consider a character (not an actual person) that has a lot of qualities you want to espouse. One of my characters is Optimus Prime. He's a good leader who is willing to get his hands dirty and do the work himself, and it inspires others to join him, even when the situation seems impossible. He consistently takes the high road and protects people who aren't able to protect themselves. Make sure as you set goals and create strategies to reach them, they align with your personal values and professional ethics. Virtually every major religion has some form of the "golden rule," essentially saying we should treat one another with the same kindness we want to receive. Regardless of your relationship with your creator, I encourage you to consider the impact kindness could have on the world, and how you can practice the golden rule while creating your strategy.

You are writing your big-picture goal- it could be something that will take years to achieve, like a degree, or buying a house. You can write more than one- but you'll need to pare it down to one or two to direct your energy in a meaningful way and make real progress. That will require prioritizing. If you need help, try considering if achieving one goal will make any of the others easier. Getting a degree and a better job may make buying a house easier. Another tactic I use is trying to imagine my future self, looking back on the decision I made; would future-me say that was a good decision, or would I think I sold out or gave up?

### Write a self-assessment

If you're an adult, chances are you've been in a job where someone gave you formal feedback. A boss may have written something down or filled out a form to give you, perhaps they did it because HR told them to and they were not very invested in your

professional development. Or maybe they did want to see you succeed but the “discussion” is one-sided and doesn't help you discover goals or reach them. It doesn't matter if your performance review experience is positive, or productive; this exercise will have you write a performance review of yourself. You will measure your current strengths and weaknesses, and identify some goals. It's ok if your goals aren't clear yet, we will create multiple versions of this document through the course of this book.

I recommend choosing five or six areas to track your progress for the performance review. If your goals are to improve communication you might have a category about written communication, professionalism, or not requiring as many revisions to documents. If your goal isn't specific to communication, you may simply have communication as a single category. The categories will depend on your goals. Some of them are probably easy for you and others are areas you want to work on. Here are some ideas for additional categories:

Interpersonal/congeniality

Meeting deadlines/volume of work

Learning a new skill/training

Certification or education

Maintaining professional appearance

Adhering to a schedule

Efficiency or budgeting

Helping your employees reach their goals

Sales calls or emails

Social media goals

This book is oriented toward professional goals but if you have health goals, perhaps you have a cardio category, a strength training category, a dietary category etc.

Financial goals may include categories like saving, investing, going for a promotion, or working overtime.

In each of these categories, you will give yourself a rating between one and four. No odd numbers so you can pick the middle, use four. You will then write a short paragraph on your current state. I'll use adhering to a schedule as an example. Right now, you may be late to work once a week and it's usually between 10-15 minutes. Do this for each category. If you need more objective info, ask friends and family who know you well and will give honest input.

Next, go through each category and for the areas where you score one or two, or an area you really feel a need to improve, write a small goal that can help you improve in the category. To return to our adherence to schedule example, you may set the goal of being late only once per month instead of each week, or perhaps you might still be late each week, but by less than 5 minutes. Don't set the goal of perfection unless it is absolutely necessary. If you're not a brain surgeon then absolute perfection is probably not the right goal.

Start a new document listing the categories you want to improve upon and brainstorm strategies. For getting to work on time, you may be able to have an alarm earlier, but that may not be realistic if you aren't a "morning person". Is it better to do more preparation the evening before? Picking out clothes, making the kids lunches, or showering the night before could be better options. Don't choose a horrible strategy like waking up an hour earlier when you hate getting up early, create a realistic strategy.

I suggest brainstorming before creating a list of how you will execute the strategy because there may be several paths to the same destination and you just need to get creative finding the one that works best in your situation. Involving other people at this step is great! More ideas mean more options to choose a good strategy and other people encouraging you and checking in will increase your accountability.

Now get in the head-space of the version of yourself you would admire, while keeping your values in mind, set a goal. Then use the same tools to create a plan. Break the goals into smaller pieces on a timeline, and complete the self-assessment at intervals.

Let's say your communication goal is dealing with your emotions so you make more rational decisions. Your plan could include exploring or scheduling time to practice coping skills, or you notice and name your emotion without reacting and then jot down those accomplishments down at the end of the interval. The self-assessment is a tool to use intermittently; maybe 1 to 3-month intervals. You can jot down your accomplishments and write steps in your plan on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. You might also adjust the plan if you didn't accomplish something on the original schedule, or need more practice. Another tool in our tool box come from our support system. One way to increase the likelihood of success is to get an accountability partner. Have you ever heard that people who go to the gym with a partner are more likely to be consistent and not skip? Though the accountability partner doesn't need to be pursuing a communication goal, they should be someone you can review your progress and setbacks and they will give you feedback or encouragement. They don't need to be experts in anything in particular, just someone who will hold you accountable to continue forward movement on your goal.