

The Science of Coaching Introverts vs. Extroverts



The Science of Coaching Introverts and Extroverts

Are you an introvert, extrovert, or ambivert?

What about your team members? Perhaps they've told you. Maybe you have guessed. There's been a lot published about introversion and extraversion lately. Even if you're not sure where you and your staff stand, you probably have a general idea of what those words mean.

What might be less clear is how these types matter to your team, or what each type's specific needs are. Do you know how to manage them? How they interact? Do you know how to coach each type most effectively, how to help them to work together, and how to bring out their best potential?

We've got you covered.

This guide will take you on a deep dive into the spectrum from introvert to extrovert, looking at the strengths and challenges of each type through the lens of coaching, and offering you some actionable advice and tips for how you can better reach them and maximize their potential.

Let's get started.

Introverts, Extroverts, and Ambiverts

If you are someone who makes a study of better coaching and leadership, you've no doubt heard the three terms above floating around. You may think you know what they mean.

But we want to begin with a word of caution.

The title of this guide is “Coaching Introverts vs. Extroverts”, and most of the information here will focus on people who fall to one side of the other of that spectrum. But it is vitally important to remember that, as with anything in psychology, it is a spectrum.

There is no such thing as a 100% introvert or extrovert. As Carl Jung—who defined these terms in 1921—once quipped: “There is no such thing as a pure introvert or extrovert. Such a person would be in the lunatic asylum.”

Most people will fall toward one side of the other of the spectrum and may be stronger or weaker in those areas.

Some people will present as introverts in some areas of their lives and extroverts in others. Some people will change over time. A select few will fall toward the center of the spectrum, and hold characteristics of both types. They are typically called ambiverts.

The important thing to remember is that you should not simply lump your employees into type categories and then think you have a clear playbook for coaching them. As you know, coaching is never that simple.

Continue to take the time to understand each employee as an individual. Ask them which type they think they are. Observe their behavior.

Remember, one size does not fit all, so it is critical that you employ a flexible coaching framework and software platform (like iCoach).

Once you have done the work of understanding your employees, the general tips in this guide can help.

With those warnings out of the way, let's move on to talk about the two sides of the spectrum and how they interact in the work environment.

Why Does Type Matter?

Today's workplaces have been rough on introverts. Thanks to author and introvert Susan Cain, many of them are beginning to step forward and ask for changes, but for years, introverts were ashamed to even admit their type. The spoils have always gone to extroverts in American schools, society and businesses. Introversions has been seen as a flaw.

That's because extrovert character traits—gregariousness, quick decision-making, and comfort working a crowd—are seen as key to success at work and in life in America. One study even showed that extroverted CEOs earn up to 7% more than their introverted peers.

The recent post-pandemic shift to more hybrid work styles has certainly given introverts a place to hide. One study found that 86% of introverts and 79% of extroverts prefer either part- or full-time work-from-home arrangements.

From back-to-office plans, to collaborative brainstorming, to “forced fun” social events—we have been taught that people who prefer to work alone and think more deliberately are backward, unfriendly, or not team players.

Of course, this is nonsense. Much of the time they are simply introverts.

Extroverts can also be misunderstood and painted with an unflattering brush as bullies or frivolous social butterflies.

These misinterpretations can result in quite a lot of friction between introverts and extroverts. Extroverts can get offended by introverts. Introverts can find extroverts exhausting. Tempers can flare. Grudges can grow.

Much of this can be avoided if people understand each other’s sensitivities and try to accommodate them. We recommend having a group discussion about types to make sure everyone knows where their colleagues stand, and how they prefer to work.

So, what exactly *is* an Introvert vs. an Extrovert?

Here’s a list of introvert and extrovert traits, as seen in their worst light:

How extroverts see Introverts:	How introverts see Extroverts:
Shy Fearful Socially awkward Unfriendly Slow Loners Bookish or nerdy Sticklers Disengaged Hostile Distant Not fun	Loud Over-bearing Pushy Egotistical Frivolous Easily distracted Unproductive Party-animals Chatty Easily bored Trivial Exhausting

Of course, these are mostly myths. While any person might actually possess these traits, these stereotypes come from a lack of understanding and proper communication.

There is only really one key difference between introverts and extroverts, and that lies in how we respond to stimulation:

Introverts	Extroverts
Introverts can get over-stimulated in loud, groups or crowds, and thrive in solitude or with just a few trusted friends.	Extroverts thrive in and enjoy high levels of social stimulation, and are restless and bored when alone or unstimulated.

That's it. Every other difference we see lies in how we respond to that stimulation.

The Science of Type

It may be tempting for skeptics to wonder if these differences are even real. For years, they were theories, but modern brain scientists and psychologists are observing biological differences in the brains of introverts and extroverts that confirm the theories Jung developed nearly a century ago.

An introvert's neurotransmitters, they tell us, seem to be more sensitive to the pleasure chemical dopamine, which is given off in the presence of crowds, noise, and other social stimulation.

Introverts respond better to acetylcholine, a reward chemical that is released during periods of quiet thought. extroverts, by contrast, seem to need larger releases of dopamine from social situations to feel good—so they seek out the crowds and stimulation.

How does this manifest in the workplace? In two ways:

- Extroverts get their energy and motivation from external stimulation and group creativity and conversation.
- Introverts get their energy and motivation from internal ideas and time alone or in quiet 1:1 conversations.

So let's list some actual traits of introverts and extroverts tend to possess at work:

Introverts tend to be:	Extroverts tend to be:
Private Reserved Thoughtful Detailed Listeners Deliberative Solitary Analytical Innovative	Sociable Fun Energetic Broad Talkers Impulsive Open Welcoming Collaborative

Again, many people take attributes from both columns.

Sometimes you can't even detect where someone falls, because people have trained themselves out of their natural inclination and borrowed from the opposite type. Many introverts, for example, have learned to fake extraversion to get ahead. You probably have introverts on your team that you have no idea are there.

What should be immediately apparent is that every company needs skills from both sides of this spectrum.

This means we need to learn how to nurture, manage, and coach on both sides.

And that's not something we are traditionally good at.

The Extroversion Bias and Coaching

As we saw above, every company needs the qualities of both introverts and extroverts to thrive.

But as we also saw above, business is an extrovert's world, and many introverts are spending a lot of energy coping with it. They are under constant pressure to conform.

Unfortunately, the bias toward extraversion is strong in companies, and as coaches, many of us have been tasked with effectively coaching 'the introvert' out of introverts.

We teach people how to better collaborate. How to be team players. How to come out of their shells. If you are coaching listening, it's probably "active listening." If you are coaching communication, it's probably face-to-face communication.

Chances are much of your coaching playbook is also full of things like classroom activities, role-play, breakout groups, and other interactive modules that set introvert's teeth on edge.

This is where a little self-knowledge—a great, agile coaching platform (like iCoach)—and a lot of flexibility come into play.

Where Are You Coming From?

One helpful way to check your biases is to determine where you are coming from, yourself. Are you an introvert or an extrovert?

Here's a quick self-test for you:

1. Do you prefer to work a problem/plan through on your own and then review it—rather than brainstorm in a group?
2. Do you prefer to communicate through written email or text messages rather than meetings or conversations?
3. Do you prefer alone time or small quiet gatherings to large, loud parties?
4. Do you enjoy working alone, remotely, or from home?
5. Do you need alone time to decompress after being social or 'on' for extended periods?
6. Do you need time to think a problem through on your own rather than answering immediately?
7. Do you prefer to confide in a few close friends at work, to having a large social circle?
8. Do you spend time at work, heads-down in your office or with headphones on, rather than wandering around looking for conversation?
9. Do you hate small talk and prefer deep, meaningful discussion?
10. Do you shy away from the spotlight when you can?

If you answered yes to more than half of those questions, you may be an introvert. If you answered no, you may be an extrovert. Consider this as you work with your coachees, as it certainly will affect your techniques and biases.

Coaching Introverts

Here are some resources to help you in coaching Introverts:

Characteristics to Consider:

- Quiet and solitary
- Intense and passionate
- Gain energy from their own inner thoughts
- Good listeners
- Can be seen as difficult or negative
- Prefer not to be interrupted
- Analytical and thoughtful observers
- Tend to avoid meetings, groups, and stimulation
- Need to reflect and clarify internally, before they talk

Most modern coaching has been designed with extroverts in mind, so introverts might challenge your coaching playbook a bit. Here are a few of the wrenches introverts might throw in your works. It's important to remember that these are not personal.

Challenges in Coaching Introverts:

- Possibly resistant to or skeptical of the idea of coaching
- May try to avoid meetings in person or in groups
- Often uncomfortable in role-playing or group break-out activities
- Often reluctant to talk, or give responses in the moment
- May turn invisible or seem shy in group discussions
- May not be close enough to peers for useful 360° feedback
- May seem overly intense, passionate, or inflexible
- May press you for deeper, underlying reasons
- May question you, and may ask for data to back up your assertions

Many introverts have had bad past experiences with coaching. They've likely had coaches or managers in the past who have tried to turn them into extroverts, and the traditional coaching playbook, with its extrovert bias, has probably made them uncomfortable.

But introverts do need coaching, feedback, recognition and development as much as the rest of us. They also want to improve and thrive in their environment. If they see that you are able to help them with that, they are more likely to respond.

Understanding Their Needs

What introverts like about coaching

Introverts appreciate the 1:1 attention and opportunity to take a deeper, more thoughtful dive into development. Their tendencies toward perfectionism mean they are looking to improve and a sincere coach can help them do that. They will appreciate developing a close relationship with a mentor they trust and respect.

What introverts hate about coaching

Introverts dislike meetings and busy work just for the sake of it, and will initially be suspicious that coaching will be useless. They also will be afraid you are going to make them spend time in groups or doing uncomfortable exercises like role-playing. They may be afraid this will be a waste of their time, or that you will try to turn them into extroverts.

Areas introverts might want or need to work on

- How to better cope with extrovert colleagues or environments
- How to make meetings and processes more efficient and meaningful to them
- How to better advocate for themselves and their ideas
- How to be less perfectionist or develop and present ideas faster or more simply
- How to advocate for their own advancement or a promotion
- How to improve relationships without sacrificing their needs
- How to find the space and solitude they need to work productively

Preferred coaching techniques: Consider 1:1 meetings, written communications, and self-guided exercises or homework that they can read and then discuss with you.

10 Tips for Coaching Introverts:

1. Set expectations together and get buy-in on agreed outcomes upfront
2. Don't bother with small talk
3. Don't be afraid of silence, and let them finish their thoughts
4. Encourage them to partner with trusted colleagues
5. Assign homework or offline self-learning
6. Be substantive and thoughtful with feedback
7. Back up your points with hard data
8. Put things in writing and leverage virtual communication
9. Be patient and measured
10. Encourage big-picture thinking to stay out of the weeds

5 questions to ask introverts:

1. When would be a good time for us to talk?
2. What would you like to get out of this discussion?
3. Why?
4. What feedback or insight can you give me on XX?
5. How can I help you be more successful?

Coaching Extroverts

Here are some resources to help you in coaching Extroverts

Characteristics to Consider:

- Energized by outside stimulation
- Sociable and talkative
- Generally, think by talking out loud
- Often open with thoughts and feelings
- Sometimes find it hard to sit and focus or listen
- Can be easily distracted, rushed, or restless
- Creative and collaborative
- Often have broader, rather than deeper, interests
- Love interaction, meetings and group brainstorming
- Develop and maintain many relationships
- Prefer busy, active, louder environments

Extroverts will generally respond well to your coaching. They like groups and talking, which are two pillars of the coaching playbook. They may become reluctant if they anticipate negative feedback, but generally speaking, they are happy to be distracted by a chat. That said, they are less enthusiastic about tests, reading, learning modules, homework, or long days of slide presentations.

Challenges in Coaching Extroverts:

- Easily sidetracked or distracted
- Often dislike writing self-evaluations or doing coursework
- May get caught up in small talk and pull you off-topic
- May dominate group or 1:1 discussions
- May use feedback as more of a popularity gauge or relationship tool
- May procrastinate or delay work they don't like
- May rush or jump into a project without a plan
- May overcommit or get burned out easily
- May have trouble sitting and focusing for long periods

Extroverts tend to have a love-hate relationship with coaching. They love positive feedback and recognition, and they enjoy the social interaction and stimulation that coaching provides. They are also goal-oriented and eager to improve and succeed.

But extroverts don't always like constructive feedback, which they cannot separate from your relationship and may take personally. They also sometimes find it hard to focus on analysis and the tedium of incremental change. They may need help staying on track.

Understanding Their Needs

What extroverts like about coaching

Extroverts love both 1:1s and group coaching. They enjoy going around the room, sharing ideas, and brainstorming solutions to problems. They live for break-outs, roleplaying, and other group activities. They enjoy talking about their ambitions performance and goals. They love public recognition and peer appreciation.

What extroverts hate about coaching

Homework! Extroverts would love to just talk things through in the moment. They rarely enjoy the isolation of self-guided learning or the burden of reading or writing offline. Their self-evaluations and feedback tend to be short, and you may have to chase them down for it. They also dislike long death-by-slide days of sitting and listening.

Areas extroverts might want or need to work on

- How to focus more and avoid distraction
- How not to take critical feedback too personally
- How to work from home more successfully
- How to avoid procrastination
- How to “tone it down” to work more successfully with introverted colleagues
- How to slow down
- How to turn broad ideas into detailed, solution-oriented plans

Preferred coaching techniques: extroverts like meeting face-to-face or in groups. They like talking and doing activities that get them out of their chairs.

10 Tips for Coaching Extroverts:

1. Begin with some conversational catch-up.
2. Provide an agenda to keep the conversation on track
3. Provide a structured coaching plan and schedule, with milestones
4. Encourage discussion focused on solutions and outcomes
5. Express appreciation and public recognition for their work
6. Allow them to work in groups
7. Be flexible with self-guided learning - perhaps pair them off with a self-learning 'buddy'
8. Hold them accountable for deliverables
9. Document your conversations and their action items
10. Host "office hours" so they can come by when they need to connect

5 questions to ask extroverts:

1. Got a minute?
2. How?
3. What did the others think or say about that?
4. Do you have any ideas about XX?
5. How can I help you be more successful?

Take a tour of Life Sciences' leading coaching platform, iCoach.

Contact us at info@RLDatixLifeSciences.com to learn more.



Premier technology solutions and professional services for Life Sciences spanning Compliance, Revenue Management & Government Pricing, and Sales Coaching

www.RLDatixLifeSciences.com