

Dear Dr. Mazie,

I am struggling with coworker expectations that I be more friendly and sociable at work. As a department director, it's distressing when people tell me I should lighten up and act like I'm having more fun. I'm an introvert, and it's just not my nature. Why is everyone so insistent that I act like someone I'm not?

Fred in Colorado



You have just asked the \$64,000 dollar question! Whether we are introverts or extroverts is just one piece of the puzzle. According to psychological theorist Carl Jung, there are 16 fundamental ways to define our differences. Being categorized as an extrovert or introvert is only one of many ways to describe us. Most of us are not really one or the other, but rather fall somewhere in between.

Very few people have a real understanding of the clinical definition of extrovert and introvert. Even those who do may be unable to see themselves objectively. Being an extrovert is not really about being gregarious, outgoing and good at small talk. And being an introvert doesn't necessarily mean you are shy, inhibited, a loner or lack social skills. In reality, extroversion and introversion are based on our energy levels and where it comes from. To help identify where we fit on the continuum, let's define the characteristics of each type.

Extroverts obtain their energy from external sources. In other words, they feel energized by being around other people and participating in different activities. For the most part, they can be described as follows:

- Want to be on the move and where the action is
- Easily bored when not externally stimulated
- Interested in what is happening around them
- Say what they think and think out loud
- Open and usually talkative
- Quick to give their opinions

- Like to take initiative
- Make friends easily
- Adapt quickly to new groups
- Interested in new people
- Easily break unwanted relations
- Have a wide variety of interests

Conversely, introverts tend to obtain their energy from internal sources. They derive energy from thinking, reflecting, contemplating, analyzing, sorting and prioritizing. They can be described by the following:

- Energized by their own thoughts and feelings
- Need private time to re-energize
- Appear reserved, quiet, thoughtful and serious
- Have only a few friends and are not very relational
- Have difficulty making new contacts and connecting
- Like quiet time to concentrate
- Tend to avoid unexpected visits
- Work well alone and can do so for long periods of time
- Prefer to focus in-depth on issues, one at a time

For the majority of us, we are part extrovert and part introvert. However, if you are at the extreme end of either type, then you may appear to have some rather glaring weaknesses. Extroverts can drive other people crazy, as they are always active and talking. And because they may have trouble being alone or concentrating

on a task, they appear scattered or flippant and can become a distraction to others. On the other hand, introverts can come across as angry, unfriendly, disinterested, smug and even arrogant. Just think of the issues that could arise in a marriage or working relationship if two people are extreme opposites!

The goal for each of us is to identify where we fall and then work to strengthen our weaknesses. Extroverts need to focus on those attributes that can make them seem unprofessional. No one wants to be perceived as a distraction to their coworkers. If this describes you, then you may want to learn to stay focused, act a bit more serious and stay quiet when the setting warrants more listening and less talking. Introverts need to make an effort to look less serious by smiling more and showing an interest in others by reaching out and being more communicative.

Just a few small changes can work wonders in changing the perception that others have of you. It doesn't mean you need to change who you are.

For more information explore the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). For a free assessment visit <http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes2.asp>

A nationally recognized speaker, workshop leader and trainer, Dr. Mazie Leftwich, Psy.D has a clinical background in applied psychology with expertise in organizational and personal development. She is Senior Vice President of Contract Land Staff, LLC, where she oversees training and team excellence programs.

