

I'M AN INTROVERT AND I'M OK

Patrick Splawa-Neyman is currently transitioning to a career in the library and information sector. He's studying for a Master of Information Management at RMIT University and he is also a co-convenor of the new graduates stream at next month's ALIA National 2014 Conference. Patrick believes the notion that extroverts have the edge in our profession is long overdue for a rethink.

I have been a pharmaceutical sales rep for over seven years. It's a highly extroverted and fiercely competitive field where reps are only as good as their latest sales results. In that time I have been personality-profiled to within an inch of my life, each time with the same result: I am an introvert.

As an introvert (and a new graduate transitioning into libraries) I'm not shy, I'm not a misanthrope and I'm not antisocial. There's nothing wrong with me, and I don't need to be more like anyone else.

WHEN YOU COMBINE A NEW GRADUATE'S STRONG DESIRE TO CONTRIBUTE WITH AN INTROVERT'S STRENGTHS IN CRITICAL OBSERVATION AND ATTENTION TO DETAIL, THE RESULT IS SOMEONE WHO CAN MAKE A VITAL CONTRIBUTION.

Introverted new graduates may have a difficult time putting their views forward in the belief that as inexperienced librarians they have little to offer. On the contrary, new graduates bring a fresh perspective from a history of non-library activities and a strong desire to contribute.

New graduates have the theory but not the practice, so we tend to ask a lot of questions. When you combine that with an introvert's strength of critical observation and attention to detail the result is a new graduate who can make a vital contribution.

Introversion is sometimes viewed as a lack of extroversion but that's not right; there is no deficit and there is no need to diagnose. Introversion and extroversion are like a continuum; we aren't simply introverted or extroverted. They are preferences, meaning introverts can act in an extroverted manner but it's not how they prefer to act. We need to stop thinking in terms of a dichotomy.

The world needs introverts and extroverts and it's a mistake to consider one superior to the other. A world full of extroverts would be just as irksome as a world full of introverts. There is no causal link between extroversion and greater success, happiness or intelligence.



Proudly introvert:
Patrick Splawa-Neyman

Introverts may need to alter the way they interact with others, which is something I do on a daily basis in sales. We may need to temporarily modify our behaviour, which is fine as long as we don't forget what we are. We can speak with more conviction, use a faster pace and remember that we have important ideas and suggestions worth contributing.

Be proud to be introverted and acknowledge your strengths. And for extroverts, don't assume that a quiet new graduate has nothing to offer as you may be missing out on their depth and breadth of knowledge. Having said that, extroverts may also need to alter their interactions with others for different reasons.

New graduates also need to keep in mind that many library jobs involve speaking in front of groups and that's not often our forte. I've even heard students say they just want to get a job behind the scenes so they don't have to have dealings with people. However, planning is a forte so we can overcome this perceived shortcoming and turn this supposed weakness into a strength.

I actually enjoy personal interactions, and I enjoy putting into practice what I've learned in theory. I'm an introvert and I wouldn't have it any other way.

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