

An Introvert's Guide To Leadership

In a recent Forbes article, Chris Myers the Cofounder and CEO of Bode Tree and frequent contributor to business websites, offers his perspective on how introverted leaders, of which he considers himself one, can be most effective.

He notes that as humans, we often have a tendency to mistake loudness for confidence, and aggression for strength. That being the case, extroverts often have an easier time rising to the top of an organization. Once at the top, however, Myers has observed that the traits and behaviors most often associated with introverts are the ones that separate successful leaders from failures.

The key for introverted leaders, he suggests, is to take the things they're naturally good at – deep thinking, empathy, and the ability to listen – and augment those skills with a strategic dose of extroversion. He firmly believes that if you're able to strike the right balance, you'll develop a leadership style that is uniquely suited for the modern workplace.

Listen and empathize

Leaders who are self-aware and introverted are typically better equipped to listen and empathize with the people with whom they interact. With most problems, there's usually more to a story than meets the eye. It's easy to take a given problem at face value and force a simple solution. For example, a convenient response to a team member's underperformance is to say that they simply need to "buck up and do the job."

However, this approach can easily lead to a tense culture and high turnover. Instead, Myers says it's better to listen and empathize with the individuals in question. Many times, issues like underperformance stem from a lack of communication, unclear goals, or scenarios outside of a person's control. While this isn't always the case, good leaders explore all options before jumping to such a conclusion.

Think deeply but act with purpose

People who speak first and think later can be difficult to work with because they don't respect the nuance and details of the situation at hand and act from a position of force. When these people find their way into leadership positions, the team they're working with often loses respect as a result of their behavior. This can lead to a disastrous cycle of frustration, poor results, and turnover.

In Myers experience, introverted leaders, on the other hand, can thrive where these individuals fail. Rather than speak first and think second, introverted leaders tend to think deeply about a given scenario before taking action. In contemplating the intricacies of a situation first, introverts are better equipped to communicate with their team and drive positive results. The key, however, is to find a way to act with purpose once all aspects of the situation have been considered. A tendency towards introversion is not an excuse to be passive. Leaders must be able to think deeply but take action when the time comes.

A light touch can move mountains

Rather than hammer people until they produce an expected outcome, introverted leaders bring an array of tools and approaches tailored to the situation at hand, enabling them to find the right path forward for everyone. When you're a hammer, every problem looks like a nail. Leaders who can think deeply and act intelligently, however, can find unique and often less abrasive ways to produce the desired outcomes.

Find your balance

Nothing in life is cut and dried. Introverts and extroverts don't exist in separate, well-defined buckets. Instead, they sit on a spectrum that is unique for everyone. Introverts possess the skills and traits that are found in the best leaders. However, these cannot function in a vacuum. To find success, Myers encourages introverts to augment their natural abilities with the ability to drive change and move mountains.