

Talking and listening.

I remember chatting with a very outgoing, charismatic and popular gentleman with a high degree of energy and enthusiasm. He surprised me when he said, “As I grow older, I feel the need to spend more time alone. I need the time alone to reflect on my life, what I have accomplished and how I want to spend my twilight years.” Here was a classic lifelong extrovert who recognized that he needed to discover and embrace the introvert possibilities.

Recently, I read the New York Times Bestseller book, “Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can’t Stop Talking” by Susan Cain.

For the extrovert, action is more important than contemplation; certainty than doubt; quick decisions than pondering outcomes; extroverts are more talkative, have a more appealing personality; are rated as being smarter, better looking; more desirable as friends.. Basically, extroverts are friendly, forthright and always on the go. On the other hand, introverts can be shy, highly sensitive. They tend to work alone, be deliberate; abhor small talk; prefer to listen rather than talk; are more comfortable with a few close friends than in a large group. They express themselves better in writing and have distaste for conflict.

Cain indicated that, as a society, we have moved from a Culture of Character to a Culture of Personality. We have moved from the ideal of being serious, disciplined and honourable to a pressure to entertain and to sell oneself. Dale Carnegie empowered us to win and influence people. Tony Robbins has become the guru for the Culture of Personality. Also, Rick Warren, author of “The Purpose Driven Life,” as well as many of the televangelists, became prime example of that same Culture of Personality.

The more recent phenomenon of “Groupthink” suggests that creativity, success and achievement come from teamwork only. Some of these teams are virtual, working together, sharing on line calendars, working in an open office plan where no one has a room of their own, with only the walls of the building to surround them.

In the Old Testament, God chose Moses to lead the Chosen People out of slavery in Egypt. He was the introvert. When Moses wondered if he was up to the task, he wondered if God had chosen the right person. Later on when the people complained and Moses brought their complaints to God, he felt inadequate to the task. God turned to Joshua, the extrovert, to complete the task.

It is interesting, in our talkative world, that Jesus who kept people spellbound by his teaching, preaching and miracles also took time off to come aside and pray. Even when he met his disciples when they returned from preaching to tell him of their success and their excitement; he simply invited them to come aside and pray for a while.

Some time ago, I employed a man to erect a polytunnel for growing my organic vegetables. During the two days of construction, we engaged in some conversations. He was married for twenty five years. As a master carpenter, he likes to work alone and likes to befriend nature. He likes the solitude of getting in his fishing boat on weekends and heading off fishing alone. The fish he catches, he gives away as he is not a great eater of fish. On the other hand, his wife is bubbly, gregarious, enthusiastic, loves to be around people and to travel. Recently, she said to him, “We have been married for twenty-five years. How did we survive? We are such opposites.”

Toward the end of her book, Cain says, “We all write our life’s stories as if we were novelists with beginnings, conflicts, turning points and endings. And the way we characterize our past setbacks profoundly influences how satisfied we are with our current lives. Unhappy people tend to see setbacks as contaminants that ruined an otherwise good thing, while generative people see them as blessings in disguise.

Love is essential. Gregariousness is optional. Cherish your nearest and dearest. Work with colleagues you like and respect. Scan new acquaintances for those who might fall into the former categories or whose company you enjoy for its own sake. And don’t worry about socializing with everyone else. Relationships make everyone happier. Think quality over quantity. The secret to life is to put yourself in the right lighting. For some, it’s a Broadway spotlight; for others, a lamplight desk. Use your natural powers – persistence, concentration, insight and sensitivity – to do work you love and work that matters. Solve problems, make art, think deeply.”