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Decoding myths and perceptions of introverts for extroverts

In March 2013, I wrote a column titled “The Perks of Being an Introverted Lawyer.” In the two years since, there have been a number of people who have told me how much that article meant to them and that I must be one of those introverts in the “she hides it well” camp.

I have also been interviewed by several lawyers who likewise consider themselves introverts and have expressed interest in exploring ways to cope as an introvert, in what by every measure is a very extroverted world.

My takeaway from these experiences is that the discussion about introverts remains an important one that resonates with many. Indeed, there still remains much mystery and intrigue about what makes us introverts tick. We are among the most misunderstood in society, particularly when we spend most of our lives donning extroverted clothing.

One of the most important things we can all do is to understand and respect the different personality traits of those around us. While people do not always demonstrate the same set of traits across personality types, certain tendencies often manifest themselves.

For all of you extroverts who are interested in better understanding the introverted contingent in your universe, here are some tips for working and living with introverts.

1. Understand what being introverted means.

Being introverted simply means that we recharge our batteries by being alone rather than by being with others.

This tendency often manifests itself through our work habits and how we choose to spend our free time. If we do not get enough alone time, we can feel run down and edgy.

2. Understand what being introverted doesn't mean.

An important part of success-

fully interacting with an introvert is understanding what being introverted does *not* mean. For example, it does not mean that we are shy, nor does it mean that we are aloof.

It also does not mean that we are arrogant, or that we do not like people. We are just like everyone else — we just need more alone time than many.

3. Introverts are quiet — but that doesn't mean we don't have anything to say.

While we may not be quick to speak, it does not mean we don't have an opinion. It simply means we are gathering data points and want to hear from others first before formulating our own opinion and taking the steps to express it.

4. Introverts have good listening skills.

Introverts tend to do a lot more listening than talking. We also tend to be perceptive and notice details that others may miss. This is just how we are wired.

As a result, we may arrive at ideas and solutions that are a bit different than the average person but that nevertheless meaningfully contribute to the bottom line.

5. Introverts are deep thinkers.

We are very analytical and try to see all sides to a particular situation before making a decision. During our quiet time, we

are often thinking about a variety of issues on parallel tracks. This is what we tend to do in lieu of talking to others.

6. Introverts can be hard to read.

This is because we are quiet and often will not speak our

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CHRISTINA
L. MARTINI

Christina L. Martini is a practicing attorney, author and columnist. She is chair of the Chicago intellectual property practice group at DLA Piper and has been in private practice since 1994. She focuses her practice on domestic and international trademark, copyright, domain name, Internet, advertising and unfair competition law. She frequently speaks and writes regarding the legal and business landscapes and appears monthly in Chicago Lawyer magazine as a columnist of “Inside Out.” You can reach her at christinamartini.paradigmshift@gmail.com.

minds freely unless we are with others whom we know well and trust.

Our silence can also be misconstrued for something more than what it is; after all, we live in an environment of perpetual stimuli. This is not only exhausting for the typical introvert, but others tend to think that something is wrong when the introverts among us aren't enthusiastically contributing to the barrage of communications.

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7. Crowds often make introverts uncomfortable.

Don't get me wrong — intro-

verts enjoy being with people. We just tend to prefer one-on-one communications or being in small groups, particularly with people whom we already know. Introverts do not usually enjoy engaging in idle chitchat and instead seek a more meaningful connection with others.

8. Introverts need time alone.

It's an energy thing. When introverts have spent a lot of time with other people, particularly those whom we do not know, it can be a physically draining experience. We need time by ourselves to recalibrate and re-energize for our next encounters.

Given how busy our lives are, finding adequate time to do this can be tough. So for those of you who find yourself interacting with an introvert who seems a bit out of sorts, it may very well be that we have not been able to sufficiently recharge our batteries.

9. Introverts don't like being the center of attention, particularly in social settings.

Again, it's an energy thing. Being the center of attention at a social event requires a lot of energy and takes us introverts outside of our comfort zone.

While we are able to do what it takes and can actually be quite outgoing and engaging while doing it, introverts need to find some quiet time soon thereafter to recharge.

10. Introverts are self-aware and know we are introverted.

Sometimes introverts feel insecure or even guilty about being the way we are. This is particularly true given the societal pressure to always be on, which tends to make things even more difficult for the introverts among us.

We usually know what we need to do in order to get ourselves back into equilibrium if we have been engaged in extroverted activities. The extroverts among us should do what they can to give us the space to do that, knowing that we will be back with them all the more quickly.