

"A must-have book for today's quiet warriors."  
SUSAN CAIN, *New York Times* bestselling author  
of *Quiet* and *Quiet Power*

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

# QUIET IS A SUPERPOWER

*THE SECRET STRENGTHS  
OF INTROVERTS IN THE  
WORKPLACE*

JILL CHANG

Foreword by Jennifer B. Kahnweiler, PhD,  
bestselling author of *Quiet Influence*



## **Praise for *Quiet Is a Superpower***

"Jill is living proof that introverts can thrive in the workplace and in different cultural settings. Her practical new book will welcome Taiwanese readers to the Quiet Revolution of introverts. With an assortment of real-world cases, Jill shows that introverts can excel in the workplace—and be great assets to their organizations—just by being their authentic selves and by using their unique traits to their advantage. A must-have book for today's quiet warriors."

—**Susan Cain, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Quiet* and *Quiet Power* and cofounder of Quiet Revolution**

"Being an introvert in today's workplace is not often an easy road, but this book will show you how to navigate that world with confidence by drawing upon your own natural strengths. Author Jill Chang has diverse, global experience as a marketing specialist, international grant-making advisor, and mentor. She writes beautifully about her own struggles and successes as an introverted professional. Readers will find this book both practical *and* inspiring."

—**Jennifer B. Kahnweiler, PhD, author of *The Introverted Leader*, *Quiet Influence*, and *The Genius of Opposites***

"This book has an important message for us introverts: we can be successful—in our very own way. Jill offers plenty of encouraging examples and smart strategies that help make this message true."

—**Sylvia Löhken, PhD, author of *Intros und Extros* and *Leise Menschen—starke Wirkung***

"Many introverts struggle in the workplace because they haven't figured out how to adapt their office politics and self-promotion to their personality. Chang provides solid strategies to help these introverts shine in their own quiet way."

—**Sophia Dembling, author of *The Introvert's Way* and *Introverts in Love***

"I have read numerous workplace guides for introverts, but Jill Chang's book is different. She makes success look easy because ease is the very thing she teaches. Through gentle and practical guidance, the reader learns how to remove the 'heavy armor' of extroversion expected by society and to be a 'comfortable introvert.' Chang, an executive whose territory now encompasses three countries, is living proof of that comfortable success. An invaluable resource."

—**Laurie Helgoe, PhD, author of *Introvert Power***

"Jill has written a book that's like a conversation with a good friend: encouraging, enlightening, and full of valuable insights. She holds a mirror up to introverts that reflects our best selves and gives ample advice on how to embrace our strengths. You'll find warmth, humor, and wisdom in her words that will give you new energy to be your best introvert self!"

—**Beth L. Buelow, PCC, author of *The Introvert Entrepreneur***

“Thank you, Jill Chang, for introducing the first book about introverts in the workplace into the Chinese market. May your book enable introverts to recognize and harness their talents and extroverts to increasingly appreciate their introvert colleagues.”

—**Nancy Ancowitz, presentation and career coach, author of *Self-Promotion for Introverts*, and Adjunct Faculty, New York University**

“Jill Chang has written an empowering companion for those who are quiet, thoughtful, and kind—and sometimes most unjustly underrated. An introvert herself, she sheds a much-needed light on the extraordinary strengths and abilities introverts bring to the workplace. A candid, splendid book that lets your inner introvert shine!”

—**Doris Martin, PhD, author of *Leise gewinnt*, *Smart Talk*, and *Words Don't Come Easy***

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OF INTROVERTS IN THE  
WORKPLACE*

JILL CHANG



Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

# Quiet Is a Superpower

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*To all the introverts,  
and everyone and  
everything that allows  
us to shine quietly.*



# C O N T E N T S

Foreword by Jennifer B. Kahnweiler, PhD	ix
Preface	xi
Introduction	1

## **Part 1: First Steps for Tackling the Workplace**

1. The Tangled Lives of Introverted Nine-to-Fivers	9
2. Broadening Your Horizons by Breaking into the Extrovert's Cultural Sphere	15
3. The Tragedy of Language Barriers	19
4. The Big Differences between Introverts and Extroverts in the Workplace	25
5. Which Jobs Are Suitable for Introverts?	33
6. Tips for Adapting to a New Environment with Zero Stress	41

## **Part 2: Introverts Getting Interpersonal**

7. Quality, Not Quantity	53
8. You Don't Want to Face Interpersonal Conflicts, But . . .	61
9. Shaking Off the Emotional Influences of Others	69
10. Communication Tools—Choosing Them Wisely, Using Them Effectively	79
11. Cool and Collected on the Negotiating Battlefield	87
12. Advice for Introverts Who Travel Frequently for Work	93
13. Introverts in a Cross-Cultural Workplace	97



## CONTENTS

### **Part 3: Great Introvert Counterstrikes for Social Events**

14. Using an Introvert's Traits to Turn Social Events into Your Home Field	109
15. Deciding Whether to Go	117
16. Preparing Before a Social Event	121
17. Practical Advice for Adapting to Social Occasions	125
18. Getting Up on Stage	131
19. Does Staying Silent Mean You're Not Contributing?	145
20. Picking an Appropriate Social Platform	147

### **Part 4: Show Your Natural Talent! Self-Advancement for Introverts**

21. The Introvert and the Superstar Halo	155
22. Mixing and Matching for Ultimate Team Cooperation	161
23. Working with People on the Other Side of the Spectrum	165
24. Managing Up for Introverts	175
25. Are Introverts Suited to Lead Teams?	185
26. Being a Good Introverted Manager	189
 In Closing	 195
Bibliography	197
Acknowledgments	203
Index	205
About the Author	213

# F O R E W O R D

IT IS ALWAYS A JOY to hear from readers. Especially those who write expressing gratitude.

Two years ago, before I finished my work for the night, an email popped into my inbox that made me feel even more than appreciation. Its author was Jill Chang, who I learned was an introverted writer and grantmaking specialist who was just about to publish her first book about her journey as a quiet leader. “I’m writing this message to share with you, that I was inspired by your books and blog articles, the first book about introverts in the workplace in the traditional Chinese-language market is going to be published (finally!),” she wrote, “and luckily, I’m the author. I’m stealing the Chief Editor’s job and writing to you because you [have played] such a crucial role in my own career development, and I’d like to take advantage of this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude.”

Jill went on to humbly ask for a short endorsement, and though the book was not yet translated into English, I didn’t hesitate to endorse her work. I believe the “rise of the introverts” is fully taking shape, and it is so important that young voices around the world are spreading the word that quiet superpowers, like taking quiet time, preparing, and listening, should be embraced. I just knew from our initial contact that Jill was a fellow champion. (Note: Her book went on to become a bestseller in Taiwan and she herself became a celebrity.)

Jill and I started communicating via email and video conference and a friendship emerged. Jill was even able to arrange a work visit to my hometown of Atlanta, GA, where we had a lovely Southern fried chicken lunch and swapped stories like old friends. I have continually been taken by

## FOREWORD

her refreshing candor, humility, and sense of humor. You will find yourself smiling and even laughing at some of her analogies, like when she compares the conference room to a minefield or the United States to an extreme sport!

As you will also read in this compelling part memoir, part career guide, Jill doesn't refrain from discussing the challenges of being an introvert working in extrovert-centric areas like sports marketing and fundraising. What I especially love about *Quiet Is a Superpower* is the way she shares these personal struggles and triumphs through stories. The reader is right there beside her as she describes the daily struggles of trying to be someone she is not. Or when she poignantly writes about how stepping out of her door each day means stepping out of her comfort zone.

When Jill gives suggestions and real-life examples about how to speak up in meetings or make pitches, it is like hearing from a supportive coach who is intent on seeing you succeed. She wants you to stand up and be heard. Her cross-cultural experience of studying and working in Asia and the US also informs this book. The breadth of her understanding about how to thrive as an introvert in these worlds is wide and deep.

I am thrilled that Berrett-Koehler is publishing this book as the first English translation. Jill's story of being a quietly powerful leader will now offer inspiration to an even wider global audience. Jill has told me that she doesn't want introverts to feel so alone. I think you will agree with me that she has certainly exceeded her goal and then some.

—Jennifer B. Kahnweiler, PhD  
March 2020

## P R E F A C E

HONOLULU IN SEPTEMBER: The air is full of the aromas of summery islands. It is just my good fortune that I've been welcomed to give a speech at the University of Hawaii. Hawaiians always impress me as being happy and free-spirited. After my speech, I grab an Uber; I want to spend some time out by the ocean looking at the waves.

"What's there to do or see in Waikiki?" I ask the driver.

"Resort A's club is pretty cool. Restaurant B has pretty killer live band performances. It's a Friday night. You ought to go and loosen up."

My Uber driver, Anthony, breaks out in a smile. He looks in the rear-view mirror at me, still formally dressed for my speech.

I am sort of a mess on the inside. I start to review my thoughts. "The places or things that most people find relaxing don't actually calm me down . . . Am I the only person like this?"



Even though I still struggle with anxiety and often feel alone, I've become very successful. When the forum for my speech moved back to Asia, my speech broke the record for audience size; the number of attendees was twice that of the last record for that venue. Even though the lecture hall was packed with people, the audience (mostly introverts) was quiet and peaceful from start to finish. Many in the audience politely made way for seniors and opened up space for parents who had brought their kids. When I was signing books after the speech, people let those who had traveled from far away come up to the front of the long, snaking queue so that they wouldn't be late in getting home.

## PREFACE

When you're an introvert, you often come across people who assume that everyone wants to go to a party to relax or that if someone doesn't seek out conversations, that person doesn't care about them. I have found that a large part of my career has been resisting such stereotypes and forging my own path when it comes to these ways of the workplace.

Although I was born and raised in Taiwan, I have worked several competitive jobs, both in the professional sports industry and for a state government in the US. Currently, I work as the Asia Pacific network manager for an international organization, managing teams from more than twenty countries. I have spent a long time learning that, aside from the introvert-extrovert dichotomy, there's also a cultural aspect to everything. One-hat-fits-all doesn't work. I've managed absolutely brilliant people whose abilities have all been underestimated simply because they don't like to flamboyantly market themselves; I've met many Asian-Americans and Asian parents who worry about themselves or their kids not being able to compete with others in the job market or workplace because they fear being seen as "kind of quiet."

Earlier in my career, I was constantly made uncomfortable by similar thoughts, but even after reading several books on introversion, it didn't help much. I was still unable to find a method for coolly speaking up in a meeting, for talking confidently when I was up on stage, or for elegantly building relationships in social situations. However, after more than a decade of trying, I am finally able to do these things. I now want to share all that I've learned with you. More importantly, I want you to know that introverts have ways of discovering and honing themselves and their strong-points—of shining brightly in the workplace and of effortlessly switching between communication styles when they are in different cultures.

Everything I relay in this book is from my own experiences and stories about them. But setting them down has not been easy; being out in the open with my struggles causes me a lot of anxiety. After my book first came out in Taiwan, people would occasionally recognize me when I was out shopping at Costco or reading at a bookstore, or going about my daily life in some other way, inducing unexpected pangs of fear in me (even though

## PREFACE

the average person might mistake them for surprise). But after a while, I learned there was nothing to be afraid of. Each time I am recognized, I see people's eyes blaze full of thanks and appreciation. I know I am like other introverts in the community who help each other without thinking twice about it. I know that if I were asked to write this book again, I'd do so in a heartbeat.

This book has helped many people in Asia and has had numerous positive reviews. Whether you're someone searching for your own niche in your workplace, someone who is looking to cordially deal with conflict among people of different personality types, or, like me, you're someone who has to regularly meld into different cultures, I hope reading all the tips in this book helps you gain some insight and benefits.



Let's now return to my Hawaii story with the Uber driver, Anthony. He recommends bars and clubs to me just as he does for countless other ride-sharers. He tells me something that surprises me after he finishes, though: after he gets off work on Friday, all he really wants to do is just chill on his comfy couch, crack open a beer, and veg while watching TV. "Oh, I thought you were interested in what everyone else is into," he says when I agree that I have similar inclinations. "We aren't just ordinary people, ya know? We're superpowered introverts!" I laugh in reply.



# I N T R O D U C T I O N

ON A SUMMER AFTERNOON FILLED with brilliant rays of sunlight, I sit down in a cafe in Taipei's busiest business district with a group of young, college-aged women. The air is filled with the wafting, sweet aroma of pour-over coffee. When we look out the floor-to-ceiling glass windows next to us, we see the abundant greenery that fills this street scene, which is similar to much of Taipei. The nine-to-five crowd is speed-walking by at a busy pace, chock-full of energy.

We are sitting here for one reason—a competition. Students who have made it through a gauntlet of previous competitions can choose to interview any of the professional *senpais*, or senior mentors, who are working in an industry the students are interested in. The women in front of me have backgrounds ranging from literature to hard sciences. These women, who are at least ten years my junior, all arrived early to the cafe. They look as if they are on pins and needles just waiting for me to sit down and begin bestowing my wisdom on them. The first words that come out of my mouth are “Could you please do me a favor? You gals don’t need to be so nervous, OK? It puts a lot of pressure on me.” Suddenly, they are all smiles! The next thing I know, we are all sitting back, laughing, and having a good time discussing various topics. After the interview, when I am reading through the heart-felt, handwritten feedback cards they left for me, I am astonished. The most rewarding thing that they got from this event is not hearing about my career experiences or anything related to the competition. What stirred their coffee the most is how to face job-market challenges as an introvert. That’s when it hits me: I am going to write a book about this!





## INTRODUCTION

When I took the Myers-Briggs personality test, my introversion index result was 96 percent. I was an introvert to a tee! Whenever I step into an elevator, I immediately press the close button to prevent some random person from joining me within a split second. When it comes to choosing between washing the dishes and taking out the trash, I always opt for the former because taking the trash out carries the risk of running into strangers, or worse, people I actually know. These are just a couple of examples of my own introversion. If I were to give a much more in-depth description of my particular habits, I think I could probably turn it into a movie longer than the entire *The Fast and the Furious* (F&F) franchise using just my personal experience for the plot. The lives of introverts actually do resemble F&F—we're affected by so many different kinds of stimuli all the time.

My brother, an extroverted Libra, often chides me, asking, "What's the big deal with you and your neighbors? All you have to do is just say 'hi,' or you can just ignore them!" Extroverts are often oblivious to the tangled-up mentalities that introverts have to work with. It's like extroverts are playing the role of a planet with several protective atmospheric layers—they're completely incapable of understanding or are oblivious to the fact that they're fully protected from the constant barrage of social-situation meteorites.

In crime stories, reporters often inquire about a person by interviewing their neighbors, former teachers, work colleagues, and others to get a description of their personality and appearance. If such a report focused on me, my neighbors would say something along the lines of "She's a total shut-in, probably very difficult to get along with. I don't know, we never talked, not even the simplest 'hello!'" I always think of this scenario, but I just don't have enough energy saved up to worry about what others think.

The lives of introverts are sometimes a terrifying horror show. On the outside, we might appear as if everything's fine and there's not a single rain cloud in sight to ruin our day, but in fact, our minds are like a theater showing powerful dark forces, and the sights and sounds of thunder and lightning are never-ending.

## INTRODUCTION

From the classroom to the job market, introverts like me are called upon to carry themselves as extroverts. Classmates and coworkers who can smile all day long and say the right things are instantly praised, but people who are shy or reserved, like a child who doesn't like speaking, for example, are often seen as rude and without manners or even, perhaps, improperly brought up by their parents.

Introverts need employment, just like everyone else, and nearly every job I've had has been introvert hell. Once, when I was attending a formal dinner banquet, I was under so much pressure that my entire body broke out in hives and I had to be rushed to a hospital. As the doctor was giving me a shot to reduce the swelling, he said he was shocked. He'd never seen such a serious case of hives. Another time, I was blamed for something I didn't do, and I couldn't fight back; I ended up breaking down into tears as I was talking on the phone next to a high-end shopping mall in Taipei's bustling, go-getting Xinyi district.

However, in the first half of my career, I still wouldn't wave my white flag in defeat. I spared no effort to forcibly mold myself into the image of a radiant, victorious little worker-drone who everyone liked. I desperately wanted to become the kind of person anyone could call their bestie at any time without it being awkward; I wanted to be a gifted speaker who always had the right words, someone who is always perceived as being pleasant to be around. I spent a lot of effort putting up a front—a protective suit of armor for myself. I welded on all the ideal quality labels that everyone seemed to love so much; I was “lively,” “cheerful,” “pleasant,” “positive,” “full of energy,” and so on. Although this armor was getting heavier and heavier, because it was my protection and because it seemed like it was what everyone liked and wanted, I kept miserably donning it. I kept at it all the way up until I went on a trip to Malaysia, during which I read through Susan Cain's book, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*. I was so moved that I read that book three times during that five-day trip! In the process of reading, I often had to stop myself, lift my head, and just breathe deeply. What shook me to my core was that I finally realized that I wasn't any worse than anyone else; I was just different.

## INTRODUCTION

Mainstream values in society often tend to come as single standards: we have beauty standards and standards of success, and only one type of personality is referred to as “normal.” We’re all trying to become that one standard, but while doing so, we forget the person we really are deep inside. When I realized and absorbed all of this, I decided to leave my job, the one that everyone on the sidelines thought was such a sweet gig. I threw myself fully into nonprofit work, which is what I feel passionate about, contributing to what I think is important and meaningful to Taiwan. I decided to never again hide my own introversion. I decided to figure out who I really was and dig out my strong points so I could allow them to complement my introversion.

Nowadays, I still have a suit of armor, but it’s much more functional. It’s lightweight, it fits me better, and I can wear it when I really need to. I can even proudly shout out to the world that “I’m an introvert!” and still feel fully content and at peace. My point is that my work has been influenced by these changes: I was able to find my own groove and I was able to get a promotion within a short period of time after having started my new career. In my wildest dreams, I never thought I would be able to work for an international organization and manage the operations for several countries.



When I think back on my previous self, I am reminded of the confusion displayed by the group of college-aged women who interviewed me and their trepidation about the job market. They remarked that they hoped they could be brave and gentle but determined just like I am. That’s not what I want for them, though. I hope they can get in touch with who they really are and just be themselves. They don’t need to waste so much time and effort, like I did, only to end up back on the path that was originally laid out before them.

Many of the stories in this book are my own experiences. For introverts like me who focus a lot on maintaining their privacy, it takes a lot of guts to be this honest and open. When I found out that my name and my picture

## INTRODUCTION

were going to be on the cover of the book, I felt so terrified, and still do, even to this day. But if I can help other introverts in any way with this book, or if it helps more people understand their introverted colleagues, friends, loved ones, and so on, then it'll be worth all the embarrassment!