

An Excerpt From

***Quiet Influence***  
***The Introvert's Guide to Making a Difference***

by Jennifer B. Kahnweiler, PhD  
Published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers

"This extraordinary book shows that you don't have to raise your volume to have a voice."

—Susan Cain, author of *Quiet*

# QUIET INFLUENCE

*The Introvert's Guide to Making a Difference*

**JENNIFER B. KAHNWEILER, PhD**  
Bestselling author of *The Introverted Leader*

QUIET  
**Influence**

## Quiet Influence

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Making a Difference

Jennifer B. Kahnweiler, PhD



**BK**<sup>®</sup>

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*To Bill, who has quietly influenced me  
to love him . . . then and now.*

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## Preface

*“In every performance review, I’m told I need to speak up more. That I need to spend less time in my office with my door closed. My boss says I have to ‘sell’ my ideas with more enthusiasm. My co-workers say that I need to be more of a ‘team player’ and less of a ‘report generator.’ Believe me, I’ve tried. It seems that when I try to develop those skills, though, I’m just acting like someone else. I feel as if I have less of an impact rather than more. How can I be me and still make a difference?”*

Sari sighed and shrugged her shoulders with more than a hint of frustration as she posed the question to me during a workshop I was leading at her company. I’ve been asked a similar question many times, and I always feel a sense of sorrow in answering. The reality is that introverts are indeed continually asked to adapt to an extrovert-centric workplace that rewards being out there and on stage. Organizational cultures support those who talk about their accomplishments, who spend more time out and about networking instead of alone deep in thought, and who make sure they are the first to get their ideas heard.

If you are an introvert, you probably feel as perplexed and underappreciated as Sari. Know that you are not alone and that there is a solution—one that not only honors who you are

but also dramatically and immediately ramps up your ability to make a difference at work. *Quiet Influence* gives you that solution and shows that it resides precisely in the place where you are most comfortable: deep inside yourself.

This book is not about how introverts need to adapt to an outgoing, extroverted world. Instead, it's about learning from the Quiet Influencers among us who are making just as much, if not more, of a difference than their extroverted colleagues.

It's just that they are going about it in such a, well . . . quiet way that few seem to notice them. So many books about influence miss the mark, extolling a more extroverted approach that involves winning people over by talking things up, presenting great arguments and quickly and aggressively convincing others to do what they want them to do.

Over my years of working with introverted professionals and studying the process of influence, *I have become convinced that introverts can be highly effective influencers when they stop trying to act like extroverts and instead make the most of their natural, quiet strengths.*

Because you've probably tried the extroverted methods, why not take a walk on the quiet side? You can become a more effective influencer when you tap into your natural strengths, and in the pages that follow I'm going to show you how. You'll recognize your strengths and learn ways to enhance and magnify them. You will deepen your understanding of how introverts like you succeed at influence. If you are open to building on your natural strengths through conscious practice, you will perfect core skills, develop heightened sensibilities, and bump up your confidence to influence all kinds of people and situations. As a result, you will greatly enhance your influencing success rate by embracing an alternative to traditionally western Type A approaches to interactions.

Perhaps you land more on the extroverted side of the line as someone energized by people and the outside world. Why not take a walk on the quiet side? Through this book, you will deepen

your understanding of how introverts succeed at influence. You will find that learning from introverts offers an enlightening opportunity to balance out your own (likely louder) ways of influencing. If you are open to experimenting with a different side of yourself, you will greatly enhance your own influencing portfolio so that you can have a bigger impact in a wider variety of situations. You'll get noticed precisely because you are trying something new.

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## Introduction

# Why Quiet Influence, Why Now?

Do you work in a company? How about in a nonprofit that competes for funding?

Do you work in a government agency with contractors?

Are you an entrepreneur or freelancer who sells products or services?

Are you in technology, engineering, or science?

Do you work in sales, marketing, project management, teaching, medicine, the law, human resources, or administration?

The truth is that everyone in a professional role needs to influence others. From Seoul to Seattle, today's competitive workplace demands that you influence a variety of situations and people, not once in a while but multiple times a day. Although influence is sometimes about really big issues and opportunities, it is also about nudging change along one small step at a time.

Noted researchers such as Jay Conger ("The Necessary Art of Persuasion") have found that selling ideas and getting people on board is a process, not an event.<sup>1</sup> Influence is not about forcing people to come to see things your way but about learning from

others and negotiating a shared solution. This approach is well suited to the introvert temperament. It involves patience, planning, and perseverance. If we all think that the only way to get things done is to shout louder and louder and take up more center-stage space, we'll miss the opportunities to listen, learn, and respond thoughtfully.

It may be that our society is starting to get this message. Extroverts are slowly (very slowly, some argue) realizing that we stand to lose the wisdom and contributions of more than half of the population if we don't listen to the introverts in our world. Since the 2009 publication of my last book, *The Introverted Leader: Building on Your Quiet Strength* (the first book about introverted leaders), a firestorm of other books (including Susan Cain's 2012 *New York Times* bestseller *Quiet*), articles and social media have crusaded for the cause of introverts. I have been gratified to hear the buzz of such conversations everywhere.

Moreover, even though they will never really experience how an introvert truly feels, extroverts are starting to get the differences on a personal level. They push their pens in my hand to sign a copies of *The Introverted Leader* for their sons, spouses, and siblings, who they never quite understood. Hope for a broader change springs from such a personal connection.

Perhaps the strongest driver for Quiet Influence, however, is how it can contribute to success in today's shifting workplace. These four trends indicate that the time for Quiet Influence is now:

**1. Flattened organizations** and complex vendor, supplier, and customer interactions mean that you must, no matter what your position or personality type, be effective at getting your ideas heard. Gone are the days when you can rely on a boss or your boss's boss to make your case for you. You have to establish critical relationships and communicate key messages yourself.

**2. Going global** means that you need to find multiple ways to influence an increasingly diverse set of colleagues and customers.



For example, your more reflective, low-key influencing approach will be much more effective with your colleagues in Asia than a traditional extroverted one. You can use your Quiet Influence skills to make a difference with those in cultures that value a quieter approach.

**3. The virtual world is** evolving and ever present. In today's society, it's highly unlikely that you can influence a broad group of people without using digital media in purposeful ways. Introverts, as particularly thoughtful users of social media, may well be ahead of the game. They have been drawn to social media because it lets them use their strengths and better manage their communication. You and other Quiet Influencers who have already invested in learning and using social media are poised to effect tomorrow's change more quickly than influencers who have ignored these technologies.

**4. Heightened competition** for business and jobs means that companies are seeking suppliers and employees who bring fresh, innovative approaches. The truth is, extrovert-centric self-promotion and loud persuasion are passé. Today, you will stand out from the crowd if you have a knack for building up others and are committed to listening instead of talking.

Because Quiet Influence is already what you do naturally, these trends offer you the impetus to enhance those skills. Your time has come. This book is written to help you and millions of other introverts recognize, develop, and highlight your innate influencing strengths. Together, you make up about 50 percent of the world's population, and you can make a big difference in organizations and communities around the world. I encourage you to applaud the success of your strengths and practice making a difference without making a lot of noise.

I believe that as these trends intensify, the tide will turn and extroverts will want to learn Quiet Influencing strengths

from the introverts they know. Many extroverts recognize that they are more effective, flexible, adaptable influencers when their influencing toolbox includes a wider variety of approaches.

I'll admit it: I am one such extrovert. I needed to practice how to make a difference without making a lot of noise. For much of my professional life, I went along with the ill-founded belief that the Type A approach, with its emphasis on talking and finding center stage, delivered results. I am a speaker, executive coach, and author whose job it is to influence people to try new approaches in their lives. Of course, I thought, that means being "out there" and being "on." I moved very fast, did a lot of winging it, and often found a way to attract attention. As I progressed in my career, I embodied the stereotype of the loud, assertive New Yorker I was.

Yet I grew up quietly watching people. My dad, Alvin Boretz, was a TV and film screenwriter, and many of our dinner conversations were about people, their motivations and behavior. Because Dad's work depended on picking up the nuances of dialogue, the meanings of conversations were of endless interest to our family. It was not unusual to see my extroverted family of four sitting quietly in Cairo's, our local Italian restaurant, listening to simultaneous conversations around us. On the way home, we would share dialogues we overheard and wonder aloud about the lives and relationships of our fellow diners. The introverts offered few verbal clues, so we had a field day guessing what could have been going on in their lives. Those quieter, low-key families, so different from ours, were especially intriguing to me. What was going on with them?

I embarked on my career and continued to be an observer of introverts. I was still people watching, and the people who continued to intrigue me were the introverts—those people who sometimes struggled in leadership positions even though they had all the power they needed deep inside. I wrote *The Introverted Leader: Building on Your Quiet Strength* to give these talented people a guide for being in charge while being themselves.

During the research for that book and in countless interactions since its publication, I have found myself increasingly drawn to the stories and experiences of introverts. The more I speak with, listen to, coach, and write about introverts, the more I appreciate their sensibility. I have realized that the quiet language of the introvert is refreshingly different from my natural outgoing persona, and I recognize that I can incorporate introverted traits and behaviors in order to have a greater impact. For instance, instead of rushing on to that conference call at the last minute, I can spend some quiet time sitting on my deck watching the trees and reflecting on my purpose for the day. Or in lieu of randomly posting something on Facebook, I can think of the other tasks that await me. Or in working through a sticky relationship, I can write out my thoughts to gain clarity on where I stand.

All in all, I recognize that a powerful shift occurs in me when I flow into the less prominent side of my personality. When I choose to embrace my internal energy, I gain deeper insights, delve into my creativity, and become more centered. Jungian psychologists would say that I am releasing a potent force by tapping into the less dominant side of my temperament. I simply see that I have been influenced by the introverts I set out to influence.

Inspired by the Quiet Influencers I have met and the effect they had on me, I turned my attention to the question of *how* these successful introverts make a difference. How exactly do they challenge the status quo, provoke new ways of thinking, or inspire others to move forward? What inner strengths do they call upon to effect change? What steps do they take to influence others?

In my professional life, I have interacted with thousands of people who deepened my knowledge of the introvert experience and gave me ideas about how to answer these questions. Class discussions, questions after speeches, and problems that surfaced in coaching sessions have all contributed to my understanding and perspective. In my role as an author and journalist, I met a wide

range of introverts and have written and been interviewed for a number of articles on the topic of introverts in the workplace for publications such as *Forbes*, *Bloomberg Business Week*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. Through hallway conversations, follow-up emails, and blog comments, I have gained an even deeper understanding about how introverts experience their world and the ways in which they use their natural strengths to get through to people in powerful ways.

I have also been fortunate to be plugged into a vibrant community of Quiet Influencers. I specifically asked these professionals from a wide range of fields and organizations about their approach to influence. They often provided written responses, and I followed up with phone interviews to enhance my understanding. In their characteristically humble way, they shared about the myriad ways in which they make a difference with other people and organizations. As privacy-valuing introverts, several of these Quiet Influencers asked that their names not be used. In those cases, I have replaced their name with a first-name-only pseudonym. Many others agreed that I could use their names, and I have included those in the text.

I have done my best to capture the stories that motivated me as I sought to answer my driving question: *how do they make an impact by building on their natural, quiet strengths?* I then distilled their answers into the six strengths you will read about in the chapters ahead. In these strengths, I hope you find your own unique expression of Quiet Influence.

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## Chapter 1

# Stop Trying to Act Like an Extrovert

*“Lower your voice and strengthen your argument.”*

Barbara McAfee, Author and Singer

Did you know that . . .

The best ideas often emerge in the depths of solitude?

Writing a persuasive email may move a project along faster than a standard conversation?

Listening for what is not said is more important than listening for what is?

Quiet Influencers—those people who make things happen without in-your-face techniques—learned these lessons through experience. Like ripples in a pond they deliver a big impact without making a loud fuss. When introverts need to be influencers, they focus on careful thought and depth. There isn’t much fanfare or much noise. In their quiet, humble way, introverted influencers make sure that the people they are hoping to impact get the message. Yet they are frequently overlooked and underestimated by organizations and colleagues who buy into the idea that talking reigns supreme.

If you are an introvert, chances are that you've tried to influence others by mirroring your more outgoing colleagues. My guess is that such an approach isn't working for you: it's exhausting, unsustainable, and ultimately ineffective. Contrary to what most books on influence will tell you, the answer isn't about becoming the extrovert you aren't. *I believe, however, that you will become a more effective influencer when you stop trying to act like an extrovert and instead make the most of your natural, quiet strengths.* By sharing specific stories and tips from successful Quiet Influencers, this book will show you how to identify, magnify, and apply those natural strengths so that you can make a big difference without making a lot of noise. You will discover how you can acknowledge your internal energy, tap into its wisdom, and thoughtfully engage with the outside world.

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## The Roadblocks to Quiet Influence

Certainly, the louder extroverted approach dominates the workplace today. That approach, which negates the natural tendencies of more than half of the population, sets up roadblocks to Quiet Influence. Do any of these roadblocks resonate with you?

### 1. Focus on Teams

Back in the 1980s, corporations jumped on the teams-produce-results bandwagon, and the group approach proliferated, bringing us today's reality: professional work most often necessitates teamwork. Your supervisor may be called your "team leader," and your work group is likely called a "team." Our workstations are arranged so that we can sit with our teams, we do most of our work in "team meetings," we generate ideas through brainstorming, we strive to meet team objectives, and most people are not hired until they have interviewed with all members of the team. For introverts, this team-heavy approach presents a problem. Not only does being intertwined with others deplete their reserves

of people energy, it also takes them away from the physical and intellectual space, where they do their best thinking. If you are an introvert, you know that need to be alone to reflect and create. There is so much pressure that introverts talk about escaping to “bathroom solitude.” In fact, in a survey I conducted of one hundred introverts, four out of five said they “suffered from people exhaustion.”<sup>2</sup> With this pressure to be engaged with people all day, Quiet Influencers have a hard time finding the quiet time and preparation to hatch their plans.

## **2. The Need to Talk about Accomplishments and Ideas**

In most organizations, sharing your accomplishments contributes to your personal “brand.” People come to know you and appreciate the value you offer because you’ve talked about yourself and what you’ve done. The problem is that those folks who don’t “brag on themselves” (i.e., most introverts) often find themselves unwittingly out of the loop. If they don’t have a boss who seeks their input, showcases their talent, and enhances their visibility, they are often left behind. Today’s corporate cultures do not reward humility. This characteristic restraint often results in being overlooked. Introverts have great ideas that go unheard. In group settings, they may show up with smart solutions, yet can’t seem to find an opening in which to share them. Even in one-on-one conversations—especially with extroverts—they have trouble interjecting their ideas and being heard. Because these quiet people haven’t talked themselves up, they tend to fly under the radar, and few extroverted colleagues think to draw them out to share their ideas. The introvert therefore finds it difficult to get people’s attention and use that attention to influence situations.

## **3. The Pressure to Act Extroverted**

Many Asian cultures deeply value the ability to not show much emotion. Western workplaces, however, barely tolerate expressionless faces or quiet people. It seems that to fit in, you have to

be animated and verbal. Not your style? Too bad. To succeed, you have to fake it.

Oliver Goldsmith, the 18th-century Irish writer, described a character by saying, “On the stage he was natural, simple, and affecting. ‘Twas only when he was off, he was acting.” Introverts often express a similar feeling. They “act the part” of being happy, sociable, and expressive even when they are feeling quite different. Susan Cain, the author of *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can’t Stop Talking*, refers to this pressure as living up to the “Extrovert Ideal.”<sup>3</sup> One Quiet Influencer describes small talk at business events as the sounds of “competitive egos.” When she joins in she feels inauthentic.

Yet challenging the status quo and inspiring others to move forward takes a willingness to show your real self to others. Introverts find their influencing efforts impeded when others sense they are difficult to read and when they themselves are exhausted by the pressure to be “on.”

#### **4. Making Quick Decisions**

From answering a question in a meeting to responding to an overnight email from a customer, today’s environment pressures people to make quick decisions. Many workplaces value instant responses over well-thought-out ones that take a little longer. The speed of technology and an increasingly competitive global climate have revved up the pace of work. The time to ponder a sticky problem from various angles has evaporated. The “what if” questions and the chance to go back to gather more data before deciding are gone. The people we are trying to sell our ideas and products to want results now.

Unfortunately, introverts once again get the short end of the stick. They are frustrated when they are unable to slow down the decision-making process. They are not able to take the needed time to process decisions in their head and do the necessary preparation to yield the best results. Others then often label them as “slow” and



behind the curve, and they find it difficult to be treated with the respect they deserve. While they are pondering decisions and analyzing the situation, they often fail to pick up the cues that they are about to be left behind. Their “delay” often costs them the opportunities to influence the decision.

### **5. Lowered Privacy Boundaries**

Similar to unwanted probing at social events, social media sites like Facebook pile on the pressure for us to open up our inner selves to the outer world. The lower privacy boundaries create an uncomfortable climate for introverts, who like to get to know someone before baring their soul. They contend with the notion of TMI (too much information) on a daily basis.

Savvy introverts know they need to build relationships to influence others. They simply want to get to know people slowly instead of jumping right to the personal stuff. The pressure to share and connect every day at an accelerated pace stresses them out, depletes their energy, and challenges the very relationships they are seeking to build on their own terms.

### **6. Being Talked Over**

Of all the roadblocks to Quiet Influence, being talked over is the one that seems to frustrate introverts the most. In the talkative climate of Western society, interruptions abound. If an introvert speaks quietly or takes a pause, others jump in and steal the stage. Even if an introvert is speaking at a normal volume, eloquently expressing an idea he or she has fully developed before offering it, extroverts are likely to interrupt. To the extrovert who tends to think out loud, the interruption is merely a way of building off of the introvert’s good idea. To the introvert, the interruption is like a blanket that silences his or her voice. Introverts’ ideas cease to be explored by the group, and they tend to surrender to the opinions of the loudest person in the room. The result: introverts are demotivated and less inclined to float new ideas.

Moreover, introverts feel pressure to participate in the interruption game. Many introverts from Asia comment that they hear two competing voices in their head: their parents saying “be polite” and their boss telling them they need to “speak up” and interject their comments in meetings. This instruction creates a deep conflict for introverts who prefer to marinate their thoughts, taking advantage of a pause in the conversation not to speak, but to think. Not only do they face the frustration of being talked over, but they are encouraged to impose a style on others in a way that fights with their very nature.

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If these roadblocks sound familiar to you and invoke feelings of frustration, know you are not alone. You are simply an introvert stuck in an extrovert-centric world. Instead of trying to avoid these roadblocks on the extrovert highway, take a more direct, efficient, and enjoyable route. Embrace what you do naturally and see greater results. Other introverts have done it: they are out there delivering the next possible cure for cancer, the answer to global warming, and the fix for education. You can do it too.

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## Characteristics that Shape Introverts

Hopefully you’re getting the message that you don’t have to be an extrovert to be a great influencer. You can succeed by embracing your introverted nature. But what does the term introvert really mean? It’s a term many people throw around these days but few people really understand.

Let’s start with a fundamental question: When you need to recharge, do you tend to want to be alone in a quiet place? If you answered yes, you’re likely an introvert.

Technically speaking, *introversion* and *extroversion* are terms that refer to personality traits and are about sources of stimulation and energy. Although extroverts recharge by being with people and participating in high-energy events, their

introverted counterparts draw energy from within. Just to clarify: shyness is different than introversion. Shyness is a product of fear or anxiety in social settings, whereas introversion is simply about a source of energy.

This basic tendency to find energy from within comes out in these observable characteristics of introverts. See if any of these resonate with you:

**Embrace solitude** Introverts need and want to spend time alone. At work, they prefer quiet, private spaces and like to handle projects on their own or in small groups.

**Think first, talk later** Introverts think before they speak. Even in casual conversations, they consider others' comments carefully and stop and reflect before responding. They know how to use the power of the pause.

**Hold emotions inside** Introverts are seldom outwardly emotional or expressive. They can be difficult to read and thus their feelings are frequently misconstrued.

**Focus on depth** Introverts seek depth over breadth. They like to dig deep—delving into issues and ideas before moving on to new ones. They are drawn to meaningful conversations as opposed to superficial chitchat. They know when to tune into others and when they don't need to spend so much energy doing so.

**Let their fingers do the talking** Introverts prefer writing to talking. On the job, they opt for email over the telephone and are likely to prefer writing reports over giving presentations.

**Act low-key** Introverts are usually quiet and reserved. They tend to speak softly and slowly. They have no desire to be the center of attention, preferring instead to fly below the radar. Even in heated conversations, they tend to project calm on the outside.

**Keep private matters . . . private** Introverts are anti-“open book.” They keep personal matters under wraps, sharing information with only a select few; even then, only after they know those

people well and feel a level of comfort with them. They can be equally cautious about work matters and stay quiet about their ideas and alliances.

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These traits are not good or bad; they just *are*. Unfortunately, in modern society, they are frequently misunderstood, undervalued, and underappreciated. Certainly, they are not usually identified as key drivers of influence. Yet ironically, these traits are precisely why introverts often make the best influencers of all—even in a world that has, until now, assumed that you had to make a lot of noise to make a lot of difference.

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