

Welcome to the fifteenth edition of Jennifer Selby Long's *Traveling Light*. Are you blessed with the talent and opportunity to lead? *Traveling Light* will skyrocket your impact and lighten the load inherent in your life. It's based on the work of executive coach and management consultant Jennifer Selby Long. Copyright 2008 Jennifer Selby Long. All rights reserved.

## Extraverts and Introverts: You CAN Work Together Without Going Nuts



It's an age-old annoyance – that co-worker whose style is irritating. You know it shouldn't bug you, but it does.

There are plenty of sources of irritation. This week, let's look at one of the most frequent, a fundamental difference between people – where they get their energy.

We all essentially fall into one of two camps, and I bet you can identify which one you are in without the help of a therapist or sophisticated assessment: extraverts get most of their energy from the outer world of people, while introverts get it from the inner world.

I once heard a fantastic analogy for this very fundamental difference. It's so good, I'm passing it on to you. Imagine that you have 20 coins in your pocket at the beginning of the day. Each coin equals one unit of energy. For the extravert, every interaction with another person adds one more coin in the pocket. That's great for me. I'm an extravert.

But for the introvert, well, he or she has to give up a coin for each interaction. An interaction between an introvert and an extravert is like an ATM machine of energy. It goes out of the introvert and in to the extravert, never to return.

How does this play out at work? This difference can lead to huge leaping conclusions about a co-worker's intentions. I recently saw this dynamic with one of my client groups.

The extraverts called meetings, but rarely sent an objective or agenda or preparatory materials in advance. The introverts showed up (if they absolutely had to) already feeling shanghaied because they had no opportunity to think about the topic in private.

Repeated requests for materials in advance fell on deaf ears, because the extraverts rarely sat by themselves and read materials in advance of a meeting, so they saw no real value in it.

In the meetings, the extraverts wanted to make decisions and commitments, because they unconsciously trusted what was decided in a group environment more than a private one.

Now the introverts were really feeling fed up. From their perspective, the decision was rushed, and it would be unethical to make an important commitment without taking some private time to reflect on it and critique it. So the day after the meeting, they would start meeting one-on-one with key decision-makers to delay or change the decision that the extraverts had thought was final in the meeting.

End result: the extraverts thought the introverts were political slime and the introverts thought the extraverts were the same.

Here's how to bridge the divide in meetings:

1. Whether you're an extravert or an introvert, send an agenda and materials for preparation in advance. Not an hour in advance – at least a day!
2. All other things being equal, if you want a sounding board for your ideas before a meeting, ask an extravert, who's more likely to accommodate your request.
3. Allow for some interruptions rather than having a firm "no interruptions allowed" rule because extraverts tend to interrupt when they are interested in what someone is saying, and the more excited the extravert gets, the more likely he or she is to interrupt.
4. Likewise, don't hesitate to politely but firmly cut off someone who's talking too long or combining too many points at once.
5. Don't go around the room trying to get everyone to participate equally. Introverts will speak up if they feel no one is saying what needs to be said.
6. In the first meeting on a brand new topic, don't push for a decision. Ask if people are ready to make a decision or prefer a little time to reflect. If they want the time, give them the time. If you try to deny this, your decision will be undone by introverts doing their ethical duty days after the meeting.
7. Maintain a little flexibility around process. We think our trusted way of doing things is the best, but really it's just one of several approaches that will get us to the destination on time.

Always remember this: Introverts think to talk. Extraverts talk to think. Plan accordingly and you may even find you like each other.

### **Note to Traveling Light = Note to Janet = Note to Jen**

Just a reminder: a few people have told me they were going to send a reply to this newsletter, until they saw that it went to "somebody named Janet." Yes, your replies do go to Janet, and she forwards them to me, while also screening for all the junk that would otherwise come in to my In box.

### **Why I Love Spain**



Twenty years ago, I was a peon at the then-mighty Arthur Andersen, LLP. Mortgage rates were in the double digits, the economy was flat, and a gigantic wave of Baby Boomers had entered the job market ahead of me. Pre-Enron, a job at Andersen was considered the most prestigious a recent graduate in any era could get. I was supposed to be grateful that a mere young mortal like me was working at all, let alone working at THE Arthur Andersen.

My bosses (it seemed there were a thousand of them) were always quick to ensure that we knew we were nobodies who were lucky to be there, particularly the women. We came to work at sunrise in our uncomfortable skirted wool suits, panty hose, dorky corporate shoes, cotton button-downs, and stupid floppy bow ties, and we left after sunset, no matter what time of year it was. Like the entry-level guys, half of our supposedly prestigious work consisted of obsessively reviewing documents to ensure that our writing and formatting matched the highly detailed (and highly irrelevant) Andersen standards.

It was in this environment that I suddenly found myself twice traveling to Segovia, Spain for an assignment that was supposed to go to someone more senior, but she became ill so they were stuck sending the only other person who knew the project inside and out -- me, a first-year associate with no international experience.

On the first day of the program, I met with the translator and the lead partner from the Madrid office to debrief the week ahead. Amalia was explaining to the partner, in rapid Spanish, the hours I had been keeping in Chicago, and how this was what was expected of all associates in the U.S. Her brow was furrowed. The partner was becoming visibly agitated as she talked.

Suddenly, he took his cigar out of his mouth and uttered an order, which translated was roughly, "It's a crime and disgrace the way the Americans treat their employees. They are human beings who deserve respect. Furthermore, it's disrespectful to us that they would send an associate to our country and expect her to work all hours, never experiencing our beautiful historic town, our Roman aqueduct, and our culture. I am giving you a direct order. You are to make sure we get started properly in the morning,

and then you are to leave this hotel and explore Segovia. I don't want to see you back at this hotel until 4:00 p.m. any day. We are Spaniards in Spain. Do the American partners think we are incapable of taking care of our own needs during the work day?"

Then he huffed, put the cigar back in his mouth, and sent me on my way.

And that's why I love Spain.

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