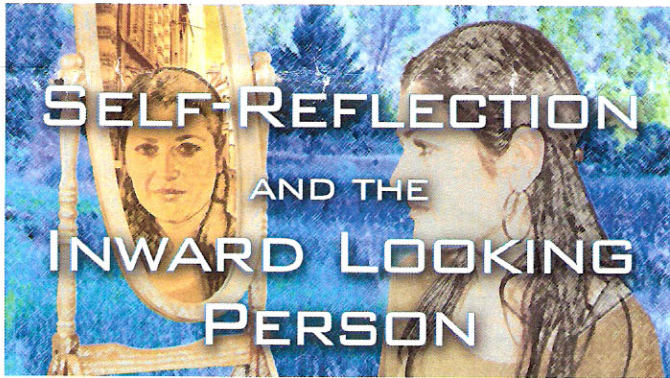


EMOTIONAL WELLNESS MATTERS

VOLUME XV, NUMBER 6



**“YOUR SACRED SPACE IS WHERE
YOU CAN FIND YOURSELF
AGAIN AND AGAIN.”**

– Joseph Campbell

We live in a world of extroverts. Our social norms are geared to people who are “out there” – those who achieve, compete, socialize easily, and are energized by the external world. Society encourages us to describe ourselves in terms of what we see externally (like TV ads) and we try to match the models provided for us. Our idea of success is to achieve a life that’s prescribed for us by the social sphere. The extrovert’s idea of happiness is to have lots of friends and to enjoy talking, even when they don’t put much thought into what they say. They like activity and being around excitement. When so much of our attention is directed outwardly, however, we can lose track of our own authentic needs.

The introvert is the inward-looking person. Introverts prefer a life of contemplation, being alone or with a close friend rather than in a group, and often favor listening rather than talking (unless they feel comfortable with the topic). They feel ill at ease and even overstimulated when things get too exciting. They appear calm on the outside, but may feel anxious internally around other people. Even if they enjoy an activity, they need time for rest and regrouping after a while. Introverts don’t like feeling pressured – and they prefer to live according to their own needs rather than the demands of others. When things get to be too stimulating, they might “zone out.”



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Unfortunately, in a world dominated by extroverts (estimates show that three-quarters of people fall on the extrovert end of the continuum, while a quarter are introverts), the inward-directed person is described as having a problem. Others see them as aloof, unfriendly, and mysterious. Because they prefer not to engage in typical social aspirations (like aiming for the fast track on the job or attending as many social events as possible), they may be called losers – wallflowers, lacking in gumption, loners, self-centered. To make things worse for introverts, they often believe the labels cast upon them and feel there is something wrong with them. Like all of us, the introvert defines the good life as having lots of friends, parties to go to, success on the job, and the ability to meet challenges with energy and enthusiasm. When they compare themselves to these social ideals, they feel that they fall short.

Introverts, because they feel pressured to measure up to ideals that don't necessarily apply to them, may experience anxiety, anger, or depression. Self-image issues are often a main concern for the introvert. They may even feel guilt and shame for failing to live up to the standards of the extrovert world. Introverts may find themselves thinking about the degree to which others can be trusted.

In the early days of psychology, Sigmund Freud felt that the healthy person was the one who could meet the demands of the outer world (that is, that the extrovert was the healthy one). Carl Jung, on the other hand, felt that people fell on a natural continuum between introversion and extroversion and that psychological health was defined by one's ability to move between these two states as the situation demanded. He felt that we all have our natural niches and that any place on the continuum is healthy – and, as it turned out, Jung was right. Recent studies on the brain indicate that it is natural for some people to be attracted to excitement and for others to prefer familiarity with their own inner processes. These imaging studies have shown that the neural pathways in the brains of introverts and extroverts are different, as are their neurotransmitters (the brains of extroverts are activated by dopamine, while the brains of introverts are activated by acetylcholine). Introversion is a natural state and it has many advantages.

The Advantages of Being an Introvert

Although the introvert may lack qualities valued by many in our society, it helps to understand that the introverted lifestyle is a powerful one. There are positive and negative features associated with both

introversion and extroversion. In truth, neither is superior to the other. Our goal might be to identify which describes us better – introvert or extrovert – and to recognize how our particular orientation can serve us best. Let's consider some of the strengths of the introvert.

Expending Energy

The attention of extroverts is generally outside of themselves. They feel energized by spending time with other people and engaging in activities with an external focus. They freely spend energy and may have a hard time slowing down. After a day's work, they might wonder what to do next. Unfortunately, extroverts may feel lonely or bored if they have to spend time alone with nothing much to do.

Introverts, on the other hand, are energized more by their internal world – ideas, emotions, impressions, thought patterns. Their focus is on the inside. If they have to spend time alone, so much the better. It gives them the space they need to reflect, work through their thoughts and feelings, and, in this way, recharge themselves. When they need to expend energy in the outside world, and they deplete it quickly, their best strategy is to plan ways to meet their social obligations, but at the same time to protect and conserve their energy so they don't feel drained. For example, the introvert might leave a party early so that she can regroup and have the energy for other obligations.

Dealing with Stimulation

Extroverts love external stimulation. The louder the music, the more people at a party, the greater the demands to perform at work, the more they thrive. When things get quiet, however, like a slow day at work, the antsy feeling sets in. They need to chat with a colleague, go out for a break – anything to keep their stimulation level higher.

Introverts become overstimulated easily. Street fairs can bring on that glazed look and the feeling that they have to find a place to sit and just observe for a while. And during their rest period, they focus on quieting their minds, breathing deeply, and searching for some peace. Their goal, and this is a strength of the introvert, is to find their internal balance and not to lose themselves in the excitement of the crowd.

This newsletter is intended to offer general information only and recognizes that individual issues may differ from these broad guidelines. Personal issues should be addressed within a therapeutic context with a professional familiar with the details of the problems. ©2008 Simmonds Publications: 5580 La Jolla Blvd., #306, La Jolla, CA 92037 Website – www.emotionalwellness.com