



ON A bright Monday afternoon, the fairy godmother of introverts—author Susan Cain, J.D. '93, whose book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking* caught fire five years ago—was sitting with her team around a long wooden table strewn with papers and laptops and long-empty coffee cups. Outside, another day idled by on this sleepy street in central Harlem. But inside, the dining room of a majestic old brownstone that had recently become the group's base of operations, Cain and her colleagues were deep into a philosophical discussion about loving kindness, the freedom and burden of authenticity, and the finer points of corporate networking. At one end of the room, two whiteboards leaned on easels, crammed with dry-erase shorthand: “vulnerability,” “journey,” “leadership,” “service,” “connection.” What the group was trying to get at was something about the nature of transformation: How do you shift a culture? What does it look like when that happens? And who is the person who can do it?

A few weeks earlier, Cain's nascent for-profit company, Quiet Revolution (stated mission: “To unlock the power of introverts for the benefit of us all”), had launched a pilot initiative, the Quiet Ambassador program, in a few offices and schools around the country. Cain is an introvert, too, and if you talk to her or read even a few pages of *Quiet*, you'll quickly encounter one of her central themes: the “extrovert ideal.” American culture, and the Western world more broadly, she argues, glorify extroversion. Classrooms and workplaces are designed around those who thrive amid the clatter and commotion of open office plans and brainstorming free-for-alls. Introversion, meanwhile, exists “somewhere between a disappointment and a pathology,” something to be overcome on the way to achieving a better self. “Today we make room for a remarkably narrow range of personality styles,” Cain writes. “We're told that to be great is to be bold, to be happy is to be sociable. We see ourselves as a nation of extroverts—which means that we've lost sight of who we really are.” In fact, she notes, one-third to one-half of Americans are introverts. If you're not one yourself, she often tells audiences, you're probably raising or managing or married to one.

And so: the Quiet Ambassador program, and this July afternoon meeting at the company's Harlem brownstone (called—what else?—the Quiet House) to throw around final thoughts. Its pur-

pose is not just to make introverts feel better, Cain says, but to help them work better and learn more, be better employees and students. The “ambassadors,” volunteers from participating organizations, undergo months of training by the Quiet Revolution team and then return to their peers ready to nudge school and office cultures in quiet-friendly directions. Advocating fewer joint projects, maybe, or more advance notice of meeting agendas. Finding new corners for solitude and silence, fostering clarity and communication among co-workers and classmates on opposite ends of the temperament spectrum.

But even as they were already training the first wave of ambassadors, the Quiet Revolution team was still trying to get a bead on who they were or, ideally, should be, what their core characteristics ought to be at the end. Paul Scibetta, the company's very extroverted CEO, stood at the head of the table with his chair askew behind him, manning the

whiteboards and guiding the conversation. Sunk deep in their seats, about a dozen Quiet Revolution team members sat around the table. At the start of the meeting, Scibetta had asked everyone to conjure up an image of a “fully formed ambassador” and then describe it. “What is it that we've created?” he asked. “What's the one thing you would want from us if you were that ambassador? Who would you want to become?” He was proposing an exercise in reverse engineering.

The answers were nebulous at first. The conversation meandered around “self-awareness” and “self-expression.” Navigating relationships. Leaving one's comfort zone. One person suggested that the ambassadors might be like marriage counselors, just not for marriage. Another talked about the tiny individual acts of bravery involved.

“In advocating for yourself as an ambassador, you're spreading a message,” she said. “I think people need to be told it's OK to revolt.” Cain brought up the importance of getting extroverts on board, both as ambassadors and as believers in the “for the benefit of us all” part of Quiet Revolution's mission statement.

Someone else picked up the thread: Heidi Kasevich, the director of “quiet education,” who leads the Quiet Ambassador program in schools. “It's critically important to have extroverts as part of the conversation,” she said. She recalled a discussion three weeks earlier with a group of students, introducing them to the basics of temperament, the characteristics that mark introverts or extroverts. “And the space just opens up,” she continued. “A sense of trust and safety emerges, and suddenly they realize, ‘Oh, that's

# Quiet, Please

Susan Cain foments the  
“Quiet Revolution.”

by  
LydiaLyle Gibson



who I am; I make decisions more quickly,' or, 'I multitask more easily.' Or: *That's why I'm quiet.* And particularly for the quiet ones, that 'Aha' moment of, 'I'm not less than the kid next to me who's raising his hand all the time.'"

"All the time," Scibetta echoed, nodding.

"All the time," Kasevich said again. Now she was rolling. "And there's a shift. There's a shift in kindness and respect," she added, "that's based on the diversity of the people in the room, talking to each other. And you just get more humane interaction. I love that phrase, 'the culture of kindness.' When you create a space for the quieter ones to speak, you sometimes get incredible ideas that otherwise would not be shared. That's creativity, that's productivity. That's trust within the team. That's power."

### Socializing as an "extreme sport"

CAIN HAD SOME INKLING that her book might be big. Not at first. When she kicked around the idea for *Quiet* in the early 2000s, wading into obscure literature on the social and psychological history of introverts, "I thought I was working on this highly idiosyncratic project and I'd be lucky to get a book deal and sell a few copies," she says. But then her agent approached New York publishers, and "They all kind of went crazy." (Perhaps they could identify with its subject: "As you can imagine," Cain says now, "most editors are introverts.") There was an auction and a bidding war, which Random House eventually won. "It was like this wild dream," Cain recalls. And then it was time to write. It took seven years and a start-from-scratch second draft to get it right.



The book that emerged in January 2012 was, in fact, the highly idiosyncratic project that Cain had envisioned. Part scientific review, part manifesto, part self-help, and part travelogue, it followed her sojourns in places like Rick Warren's Saddleback megachurch in California, where she took in a worship service amid klieg lights and Jumbotrons; and a Tony Robbins seminar in Atlanta that promised to "UNLEASH THE POWER WITHIN," culminating one evening in a "firewalk" across a bed of coals. And to Harvard Business School (HBS), which an alumnus friend had told Cain was the "spiritual capital of extroversion." There, she observed, professors work hard to turn quiet students into talkers, and socializing is an "extreme sport." Sitting in Span- gler Center one day, Cain struck up a conversation with a couple of students, one of whom advised her, "Good luck finding an introvert around here."

The heart of the book, though, is in the dozens of scientific studies that Cain mines along the way. There's Wharton management professor Adam Grant '03, talking about his experimental research on the surprising effectiveness of introverted leaders. And psychologist Elaine Aron on "highly sensitive" people with strong emotions and small-talk aversions who sound a lot like introverts. And Cambridge psychology professor Brian Little (previously a Harvard lecturer) on the "free traits" that allow introverts, and extroverts, to step outside their temperament when the situation calls for it. Cain devotes a whole chapter to the work of Jerome Kagan, Starch professor of psychology emeritus, whose research followed subjects from infancy to adulthood, distinguishing what he called the "high-reactive" kids, who were more easily overwhelmed by the stimuli of their environment and more likely to grow up introverted. His work helped establish biology's role in shaping personality and temperament as a partly inborn trait.

Cain's working definition of introversion, informed by contemporary psychologists like

Kagan, still echoes the one Carl Jung first laid out in 1921: that it directs people inward, to the world of thoughts and feelings, while extroversion turns outward, to people and activities. Introverts need solitude to recharge their batteries; extroverts get their needed charge from socializing. Augmenting that formulation with research like Kagan's, Cain forms a picture that counters lingering prejudices. (Even in the research, though, she found a lurking extrovert ideal: "Going through the psychological database to find articles, I quickly discovered that if you put in the word 'introversion,' you'll get this many articles," she says, holding

her hands six inches apart. "And if you put in the word 'extroversion,' you'll get *this* many." Now her hands are two feet apart.)

Being introverted, she asserts, is a worthy, often glorious, attribute: introverts are empathic and reflective; they prefer listening to talking and think before they speak. They are less likely to die in car crashes, more likely to heed warning signals. They tend to be the ones to make peace and offer counsel. They have "mighty powers of concentration" and remain mostly immune to the lures of wealth and fame. They're artistic and creative, especially when they work alone. The list of esteemed introverts is long, she assures readers: Charles Darwin, Dr. Seuss, Rosa Parks, Albert Einstein, Steve Wozniak, Steven Spielberg, J.K. Rowling.

## Making introversion cool

READERS REACTED to *Quiet* the same way New York publishers had—as if an untapped well had suddenly sprung open. The book became a bestseller. Cain appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine the week after *Quiet* was released, and a couple of weeks after that, she gave a TED talk that attracted half a million views in its first *day* online (now it is up to nearly 16 million). In that talk, she told a story about going to summer camp as an introverted nine-year-old with a suitcase full of books, happily expecting the same kind of companionship she was used to at home: lots of reading quietly together, with the "animal warmth" of others nearby, while "roaming around the adventureland inside your own mind." But camp wasn't like that—it was more like "a keg party without any alcohol"—and Cain never opened that suitcase. It wasn't the first time, she said, that "I got the message...that I should be trying to pass as more of an extrovert."

She also told the audience about her grandfather, a Brooklyn rabbi whose sermon every week for 62 years would "weave these intricate tapestries of ancient and humanist thought." Even though he had trouble making eye contact with his congregation, he was loved and looked up to: when he died, the police had to close the streets in his neighborhood to accommodate the throng of mourners. "Culturally we need a better balance," Cain said. "When psychologists look at the lives of the most creative people, what they find are people who are very good at exchanging ideas and advancing ideas, but who also have a serious streak of introversion in them."

After her talk, Cain went back to her hotel room and shut the door. Giving a 20-minute speech in front of lights and cameras and several hundred people had taken tremendous energy, and she would need almost a week to recharge. "I barely went outside for days," she says. But already, she was beginning to receive letters and emails that would become a flood of thousands, from readers desperate to tell Cain their stories or ask for her advice, or to thank her. Some wrote as if a burden had been lifted. In Cain's book, they saw themselves explained and exonerated. Many of them told Cain they wished they'd known all this years or decades sooner.

In the aftermath of *Quiet*, introversion came suddenly into vogue. The word began appearing in unlikely places, like *Fortune* and *Fast*

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*Company* and the *Harvard Business Review*, in stories explaining how to nurture and include introverted employees. At Harvard Law School (HLS) the annual winter-term problem-solving workshop, a requirement for all first-year students, has become a place where students are “explicitly invited,” says HLS dean Martha Minow—herself an introvert—to talk about temperament and personality and how it affects their work. “I think many of them feel reaffirmed,” Minow says, “that no, not everybody has to be a trial lawyer.” She adds: “At law schools, maybe more than business schools, many, many students identify as introverts. These are people who don’t mind spending hours and hours over books.” But even for business-school students something shifted. Social psychologist Amy Cuddy, an HBS associate professor (see “The Psyche on Automatic,” November-December 2010, page 48) and herself a TED champion, begins each new course by asking how many in the class are extroverts or introverts. In years past, she told Cain, almost no one claimed introversion. Now many raise their hands. “That’s the thing I can hardly believe,” Cain says. “To me that one fact”—introversion’s newfound cool—“is the biggest thing to happen.”

### The introversion industry

IN THE YEARS SINCE, Cain has forged her own little industry. Quiet Revolution launched in 2014, and in 2015 the company set up offices at the Quiet House—first in a two-story Victorian house near Nyack, New York, later relocating to the brownstone in Harlem. Quiet Revolution’s website ([www.quietrev.org](http://www.quietrev.org)) offers advice and quizzes and first-person essays in which readers tell their own stories. In 2016 Cain published *Quiet Power: The Secret Strengths of Introverts*, a follow-up book focusing specifically on children and teenagers. At least a couple of times a month, she is on the road, speaking at conferences and corporate gatherings and nonprofit retreats, before audiences of hundreds or thousands; during a particularly busy stretch last fall, her schedule took her from Houston to Silicon Valley to New Jersey to Los Angeles within a couple of weeks. Then there are the lunches, the phone calls, the near-constant stream of interview requests from reporters. Cain balances all that with very quiet off-time back home in the Hudson Valley, where she lives with her family: daily walks, “Zen tennis,” mornings-into-afternoons spent reading and writing, the predictable rhythm of school drop-offs and pick-ups to bookend the days.

Still, the speaking demands are a lot for an introvert to manage. Cain knows it’s ironic that writing about introversion has thrust her so squarely into the spotlight. But standing up in front of audiences gets easier over time, she’s found, and to recharge between events she might get out her racquet and hit a few balls, or retreat to her hotel room and order room service (buffalo wings, the spicier the better) and read a book.

When she can, Cain brings her family along: her (extroverted) husband, Kenneth Cain, J.D. ’93, and their seven- and nine-year-old boys. That helps, too. By the time her older son was six, the children

had been to 11 countries, tagging along on their mother’s speaking trips. “It’s a wonderful feeling, bouncing around the world together as a family,” she says. They go to parks, kids’ museums, miniature golf, whatever’s available. Sometimes they just hang out at the

hotel. “There’s something about being in a hotel room together in another country that makes life feel more heightened.” Jumping on the beds, ordering buffalo wings, splashing around in the pool. There was a particularly fun hotel in Arizona recently—“And now my son is convinced that he wants to grow up in Arizona. Like, his favorite football team is now the Arizona Cardinals.”

But the boys know what it means when Mom brings out her stockings in the morning: work. “And the really hard work,” Cain once overheard her older son informing his brother, “is called ‘giving a speech.’”

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### An awakening in Asia

IN ANOTHER LIFE, one that now seems far away, Cain was an attorney on Wall Street. She went to law school for the reasons people sometimes do: it was a solid path, and her father wanted a self-sufficient life for her—plus she found law interesting. In truth, she says, “I was the least likely law student ever.” Law school made her so anxious that she once threw up on the way to class. Friends used to ask her why she was there, when her talents should perhaps have led her elsewhere. “And I was like, ‘No, no, it’s great.’ Because for a while I really liked it, in the way that you like a foreign country. It’s fun, it’s exciting, and, oh look, I can speak the language.” Afterward she spent seven years in the corporate law firm Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton.

That’s where Cain first met Scibetta, Quiet Revolution’s CEO. Both were young associates, and although they had nothing in common temperamentally, they shared a fascination with personality. After a few hours around a table watching masters of the universe argue and negotiate, Cain and Scibetta would spend more hours picking apart their behavior. There were the yellers and screamers, and the bangers-on-the-table—and the steely quiet ones who stayed calm and waited. Those caught Cain’s eye.

Scibetta remembers, too: “After the meetings, Susan and I were always supposed to go back to our offices and draft these complicated documents in support of something-or-other. And instead, we would go back to our offices and talk about people. And that was the foundation of our relationship. That was how we knew each other. That was what we did—and we had to love it, because on top of that, we were working like 19 hours a day.”

A few years in, Cain started to suspect she wasn’t in the right field after all, and eventually she left to start her own consulting business, helping clients get better at negotiation. Scibetta moved to Japan. It turned out to be a deeply shocking experience. After college, he’d worked as a scallop fisherman, waiter, cook, bellhop, and carpenter. He had a job for a while at Yellowstone National Park and, separately, spent six months living in a tent in the Montana woods. But Japan was something else altogether. Scibetta was based in Tokyo, working for JPMorgan Asset Management. Instead of an extrovert ideal, he found a culture centered around its opposite, a place where it was

considered rude—actually, worse than rude—to interrupt others while they were speaking, and frowned on to be the one who talks more than anyone else. He would give a town-hall presentation and encounter total silence when he called for questions. “You move to Japan, and you immediately realize the randomness of Western culture,” Scibetta says. “I was raised in New Jersey where, you know, there weren’t that many rules. And then I became a Wall Street lawyer, where the norm was to shout down your opponent. Then in Asia, I discovered that that culture was something America had formed around. It wasn’t inherent to anything.”

Scibetta spent six years in Tokyo and then, after stints in London and New York, another eight years in Hong Kong (where he adopted a puppy off the streets and named her Minnie; she’s now the Quiet Dog). Then Cain called him. Her book sales were going wild. All these letters were coming in from readers. She was thinking of starting a company. Would he come help her build it?

### The talk-to-four people rule

FROM THE BEGINNING, businesses were interested in Cain’s work. The CEO of Steelcase, the office-furniture manufacturer, happened to be in the audience the day she gave her speech at TED; he approached her afterward to talk about how to build more quiet workspaces. In 2016, Cain’s company, working with the California-based Anita Borg Institute, an organization for women in the tech industry, formed the Quiet Tech Network. Building on the Quiet Ambassador idea, it brings together many tech companies to counter the industry’s own extrovert ideal, which Scibetta says is partly to blame for the scarcity of women in the field. After all, he explains, “ideal” extroverted traits are more often ascribed to men than to women.

LinkedIn, the online professional-networking service, was another early adopter of Cain’s philosophy. Pat Wadors, a senior vice president and head of human resources at LinkedIn, remembers watching Cain’s TED talk and thinking, “That’s me.” Years earlier, when she first became a boss, she’d had to explain to her team why she didn’t stop by the kitchen to chat, why she ate lunch alone, that a closed office door didn’t mean they were unwelcome or disliked. She posted an essay about that experience on LinkedIn’s blog, which led to an introduction to Cain, and the two became pen pals. Wadors says, “She was always dropping these golden nuggets in my lap.”

Wadors began leading roundtable discussions about introverts in the workplace whenever she traveled from her base in Seattle to LinkedIn’s other sites around the world, mostly “for introverts to talk about their experiences,” she says. She would share Cain’s nuggets of advice: if you need to say something in a meeting and you’re nervous, say it early so you can be relaxed and attentive afterward; if an idea occurs to you four times in a meeting, force yourself to share it, even if you’re reticent; at cocktail parties, talk to four people before you go home. “And don’t just shake hands—have a conversation,” Wadors says. She limited the discussion groups to 20 people, but

often three or four times that many wanted to take part, including extroverts who would sometimes sneak in. Waiting lists sprang up. Wadors asked Cain and Scibetta what to do. “I said, ‘I can’t scale it. I can do 20, but there are 85 people who want to get in.’” That was the genesis of the Quiet Ambassador program.

The schools version of the program, called the Quiet Schools Network, builds on a similar principle. Kasevich, its director, was a teacher and department chair in colleges and independent schools for 25 years before joining Quiet Revolution in 2015. She’s an introvert, too, and began each school year with a story to the class about how she found it hard as a kid, and even as a college student, to speak up. “And I made it very clear to them that my class participation grade would not be dependent on *quantity* of speech,” she says. “There are various forms of engagement. So if you can signal me, through various forms of body language, that you’re with me, that’s great. That’s going to count.” She met with students one on one to give them a gentle push and a “long runway” for speaking up. “It opened up a space for the quiet students to feel valued.”

This year, there are 50 ambassadors, most of them teachers, in 19 schools around the country. They’re working with teachers on how to rethink student leadership and participation, how to bring quiet time into the classroom, and how to help introverted kids through the already-overwhelming college-application process; they also educate parents about how to deal with (and avoid mishandling) their introverted children. One elementary school with a particularly loud cafeteria instituted a weekly “quiet lunch,” in a different spot, where students could eat while they read or played games or did puzzles. “We were bouncing around ideas like having poster board available at the table, encouraging more reflective writing or drawing,” Kasevich says.

It’s important to make these adjustments, she adds. “It’s so easy to see three or four kids talking. They’re raising their hands first, and the teacher is calling on them. That’s the root of the problem.

The extroverts are used to being called on—for years teachers have called on them, and they expect it.

But research shows that as soon as a hand goes up, the other brains in the room shut down.”

As the meeting at the Quiet House wound to a close—Cain heading out to pick her kids up from school and the others planning to share dinner downstairs in the kitchen—Scibetta began wrapping things up, consolidating his notes on the whiteboard, summarizing the day’s highlights and revelations.

And then came this tiny turn of phrase, easily missable, but clearly intentional: “In a minute,” he said, “I will say, ‘Does anyone have any other thoughts or questions or ideas?’—I will say that in a minute.” Then he continued speaking, but all around

the table his introverted colleagues looked slightly changed. They were now readying themselves to say something, straightening in their chairs, arranging words in their minds. Three or four minutes later, Scibetta stopped. “So,” he asked, “does anyone have any other thoughts?” A hand went up. ▢

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