

Jonathon Colman

A Guide to Public Speaking for Introverted and Shy People

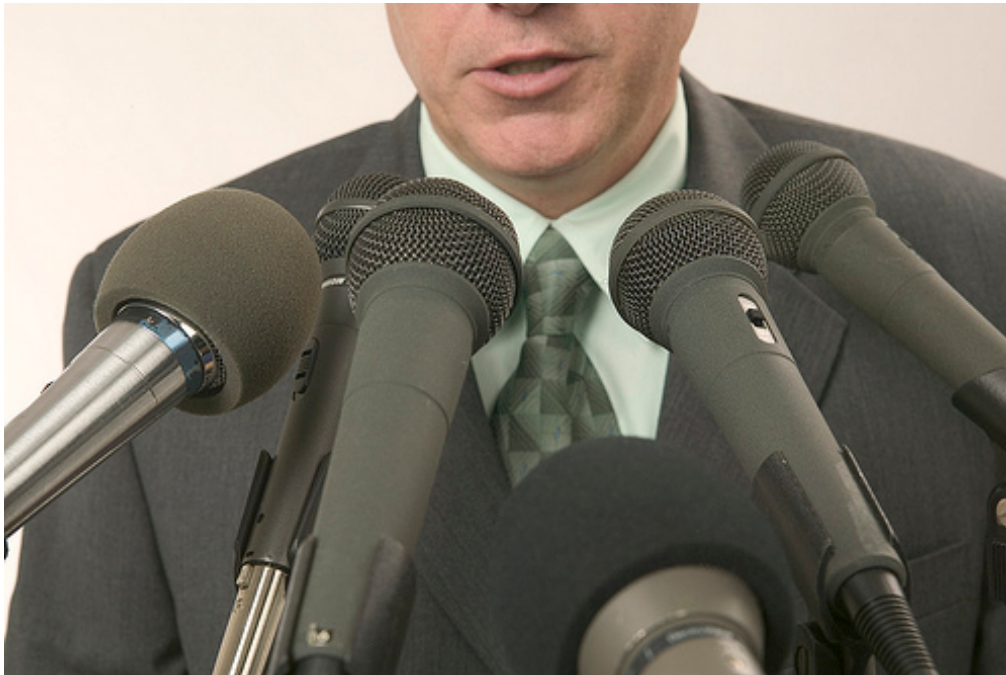
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UPDATE: I was a speaker at [Ignite! Seattle 19](#) and talked about [How Introverts Can Survive in This Extroverted World](#). I presented five lifehacks that introverts can use to preserve and build their energy as they're trying to get along in a world that values extroversion.



What should introverts and shy people do when the mikes are shoved in our faces? Photo by [audio luci store](#) (*creative commons*)

I've been challenging myself to do a lot more public speaking over the past few years. In 2012, [I spoke at 11 events](#), nearly doubling my previous annual total. That's a lot of storytelling, Q&A, improvising, and (hopefully) learning. I've been speaking at technical conferences since 2006, and over the past six years I've learned a lot by watching others and being critical of my own work.

This made me think about putting together a post on how just about anyone can become a great public speaker. I was going to call it something pithy like *How to Give Good PowerPoint*. It would be stocked with platitudes on bullet points, sentiments on stock photography, and truths on storytelling.

But first [Rand Fishkin](#), then [Justin Briggs](#) and [Michael King](#) (on the same day, even), and most recently [Ross Hudgens](#) all beat me to it!

Beyond the great ideas and tactics they shared, I was inspired by how they mixed their strategies on public speaking with honest, personal storytelling about their approaches and ambitions. So rather than just creating a tired list of bullet points already covered elsewhere, I wanted to aspire to their level of excellence and authenticity.

So I'm going to pivot off of something that Ross mentioned in his post: *he's an introvert*.

I'm Outing Myself as an Introvert



There's no need to hide anymore... and there never was to begin with. It's time to come out of the closet. Photo by [Emma.Valentine](#) (*creative commons*)

I'm an introvert, too. If you don't know me well (or if you only know me online), then you probably wouldn't guess that I'm introverted. Not to mention shy and socially anxious. That's because I go to great lengths to hide these traits. I've dedicated much of my adult life to coming up with strategies and tricks to prevent most people from detecting my inner nature. I collect them like some folks collect baseball cards and trade them with other introverts and shy people the way some folks trade coupons.

Why go to all that trouble? Well, I used to be deeply ashamed of my introversion and shyness. I used to wonder why I felt so *different* than how other people seemed to feel; like I was *The Other*. I couldn't figure out why interactions with people were so hard and so

draining. I absolutely dreaded making small talk.

At one point in the distant past, I had so much difficulty with personal encounters that even calling a restaurant for take-out or talking to the teller at a bank (remember when we had tellers? Ha, not to mention when we had *banks*?) were challenges that required focus, preparation time, and even recovery afterward.

I felt broken, like something was missing on the inside... the Tin Man without his Heart. It wasn't "just a Geek Thing" — I know plenty of geeks and technically-oriented people who aren't shy or introverted whatsoever. So it's best not to confuse the two concepts by thinking that they're one and the same. Just because you're nerdy doesn't mean that you're shy!

But this sort of conflation is part of the problem that shy people and introverts experience when they speak at technical conferences.

I Didn't "Get Better" — I Hacked Myself



"Calgon, take me away!" Photo by [Paul Gilowey](#)/Content Strategy Forum 2012

If you saw me present at the [Content Strategy Forum](#), [MozCon](#), [SMX](#), [ad:Tech](#), or [Social Media Club](#) (where I swore up a storm on the stage — once again, my apologies to [Doris Kearns Goodwin](#)), or any of the other conferences or meetups that I spoke at in 2012, you probably wouldn't have guessed that I'm either introverted or shy.

Hopefully, you saw someone who looked relatively confident and secure. Someone who was delivering new content and ideas that you'd never heard of before. Someone who got you excited about trying some new things or seeing an old concept from a new point of view. Someone who was focused on *you*, *your* learning, and *your* needs.

But whenever I got off-stage, the introversion and shyness would take over again. For example, at MozCon, I saw several folks I “knew” online — [Geraldine DeRuiter](#), [Todd Friesen](#), [Brittan Bright](#), and [Tom Critchlow](#) to name a few — but had never actually met off-line, in real life. I was petrified by the thought of going up to them and saying “I love your writing” or “Thank you for inspiring me this year” or even just a cool-sounding “Hey” with a gentlemanly nod.

And so I barely spoke with them at all. Which is a pretty big loss — I mark it down as a failure in my Book of Life.

But get me up on a stage, and I have no problem telling you secrets, making jokes about myself, or referencing nerdy things like Voltron or [My Triumphs, My Mistakes by Gaius Baltar](#). When I present, I'm a pretty jovial fellow, able to respond to changes and get the audience on my side. They laugh at my jokes, forgive my attempts to channel [Bill Lumbergh](#), and (hopefully) take away new insights and perspectives that they didn't have before.

That's quite a contrast between my on-stage and off-stage personas — pretty weird, huh? I used to think so, too. That is, until I figured out what was happening and learned to make it work for me both on-stage and off. Sure, I don't succeed all the time (as illustrated above), but I generally get along well enough to make you think that I'm extroverted and not shy or anxious at all.

How do I do that? I didn't “get better” — introversion isn't a condition from which one can recover, no more than gravity is a condition from which the planet recovers — but I figured out a few ways that I could make my introversion work for me, so that being an introvert became its own source of strength. As for my shyness, it's something that I still struggle with, but I'm constantly learning ways to challenge myself to overcome my fears. And you can you.

I'm not the only one. Such bright minds as [Lisa Barone](#), [Ian Lurie](#), [Mike Arnesen](#), [Kate Matsudaira](#), [Michelle Lowery](#), and [Todd Malicoat](#) have commented on their introversion in the past. Mike pointed me to resources like [The Plight of the Introvert](#) and [On Being an Introvert at Big Conferences](#), both of which helped me understand that I wasn't alone out there — there were others like me.

So if you're an introvert and/or consider yourself to be shy, don't give up hope. You're not alone. And you can learn how to hack yourself (and your audience!) to become a better public speaker.

Introversion ≠ Shyness



Shyness is different from introversion; it's based on fear and anxiety. Introversion is all about energy. Photo by [Frederic Poirot](#) (*creative commons*)

First things first: not many people understand this, but **there's a big difference between being introverted and being shy**. Thinking that these two concepts are the same is a lot like thinking that Elvis and The Beatles are the same because, you know, MUSIC. But in reality, they're not even in the same spectrum; they're two completely independent concepts.

I personally equate shyness with concepts like fear, anxiety, sensitivity, risk-aversion, and personal/emotional zones of discomfort whereas introversion involves one's preferences for processing, producing, and expending energy. I'm not the only one who thinks this way: [psychologists](#), [researchers](#), and even [an author of a book all about introversion](#) all warn against conflating these two terms to mean the same thing.

To do so means that you risk misunderstanding people who experience one or both of these conditions. You'll be perceiving them from the wrong perspective, creating expectations of them that they cannot fulfill. Worse yet, if you're shy or introverted yourself and confuse the two, you'll either under-prepare for your conference talk or over-prepare for the wrong things. Both of which leave your audience in the lurch.

Here's how you can avoid that by understanding these facets of your character and turning them into strengths.

Acknowledge Your Fear



Break through the hands that are holding you back. Face your fears with eyes wide open. Photo by [Nicolò Paternoster](#) (*creative commons*)

If you're shy, a big key to success is getting comfortable and intimate with your fears. Learn what they are and identify them by name. Talk about them out loud, even if it's only to yourself. Sometimes putting a label on the things that cause you anxiety is the best, fastest way to start gaining some control over the things that prevent you from speaking in public. Once you know what's making you uncomfortable, then you can start taking productive action toward overcoming that fear... or at least minimizing it so that it's no longer a factor in your public speaking.

I can't cover every fear that might cause you to be shy or anxious in this one post, but let's tackle a common one for technical speakers: you might be worried (as I often am) that someone's going to disagree with you or call you out when you get some fact or figure wrong. Maybe you think that someone's going to stand up and point a long, bony finger at you while crying out "*J'ACCUSE!*"

Guess what? That happened to me! I made a technical mistake on stage at a flagship conference in my industry. I was scared, hurt, and felt foolish at the time, but in retrospect, it wasn't that bad a thing at all because it led to a "teachable moment" for the attendees as well as a follow-up response from the industry.

The way I overcame (and continue to overcome) this fear is to dispel the tension by being

direct and upfront about your assumptions, your sources, and how/why you're drawing conclusions from a given data set. Being open and accountable is like a warm blanket that can comfort you when you're stressed out.

Why? *Because you don't have to make anything up.* But the more you leave people in the dark, the more you hide your influences and sources, the more it looks like you're scrambling, then the more it seems like you have something to hide.

Instead, just show your work — intellectual curiosity, honesty, and having an open mind for new information is the hallmark of great scientists and speakers alike. Cite your sources and link to them in your slides. Offer your slides for download so that they can be inspected later.

If someone disagrees with you, that's actually *great* for your audience (and for you), because there's an opportunity for knowledge exchange and real, on-the-fly learning. It's fun for the audience to watch and gives them additional interpretations of the subject of your talk that they wouldn't have had otherwise.



Your audience isn't your enemy. *Zombies* are your enemy! Photo by [Dan Holtmeyer](#) (*creative commons*)

As a speaker, you can keep this sort of disagreement positive and useful for your audience with a few simple tactics:

- **Be accountable.** Accept that you're going to make a mistake at some point and be honest about what you get wrong. I've made a number of factual errors when I've spoken in the past and have sometimes been called out on them. In these cases, I think it's best to admit your fault and then follow-up with updated

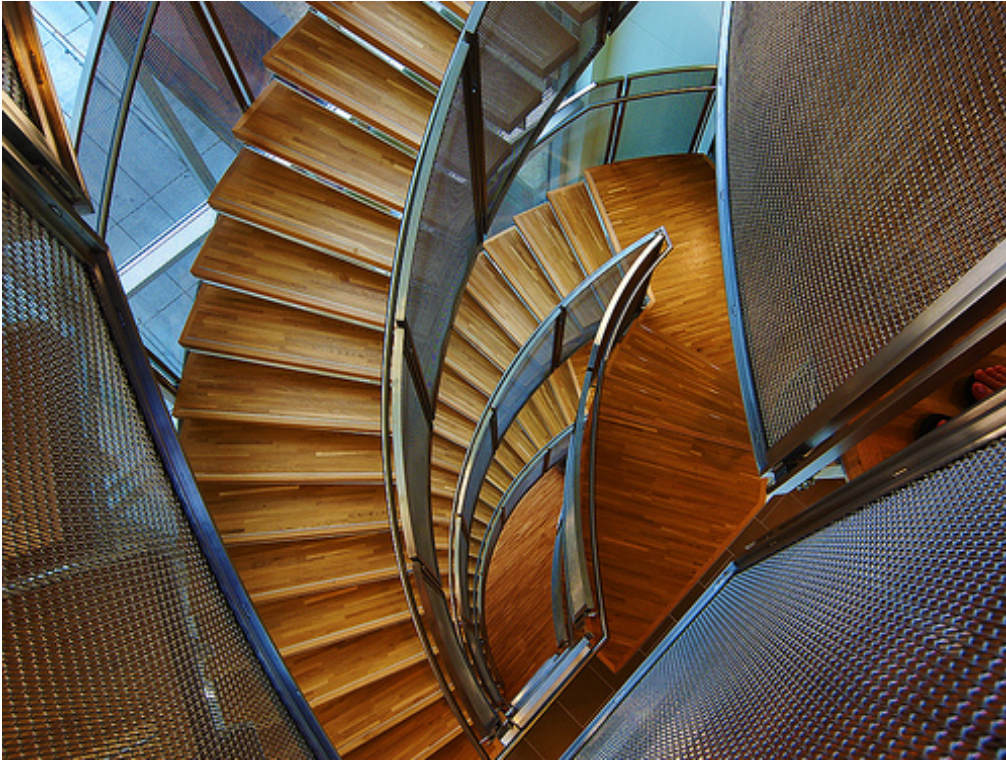
information afterwards. You can do this through direct engagement with attendees in-person as well as via Twitter, Slideshare, your personal site, etc. Obviously, you should always strive to do your best, but remember that a simple mistake doesn't ruin an entire presentation — so don't let it fluster you.

- **Save the drama for your mama.** If someone disagrees with you while you're on-stage, remember that *it's not personal* — and it doesn't have to escalate into anything more than a discussion about the facts and how your interpretation of them might vary from someone else's. Your job as a speaker is to defuse the situation of any tension so that you can best guide the conversation back toward utility and learning. Laughing at yourself when you're on-stage and showing authentic humbleness and humility before a crowd is a great way of taking ego out of the situation. I've done this before and it's always a lot of fun. You can lighten the mood and turn the talk back around to discovering the right answer or interpretation that meets your audience's needs. I've seen Adam Audette do this in the past with great aplomb.
- **Crowd-source your answers.** Never be afraid to turn from speaker into facilitator and ask your audience for their ideas. I did this during MozCon last July when I got a question about tools for tracking the amount of time that you spend on e-mail versus time spent on “real work”. I didn't have an answer, but someone in the crowd did and I helped them gain attention for it. This doesn't make you look stupid; rather, you look like a confident facilitator focused on helping people get the most out of the event.
- **Know when you can't win** (and if you're smart, don't even *try*). If an audience member is purposefully being a jerk to you when you're speaking and won't relent even when you make an honest attempt at answering their question, encourage them to take the conversation off-line so that you can get back to providing value for the rest of the audience. After all, your job when you're speaking is to provide the most value for the most amount of people; not to win stupid arguments or even to look “smart”. So if someone's picking a fight with you, don't take the bait — be the better person by turning the other cheek and offering to talk with them in person afterward. Then follow up in a quieter location where drama wins them no points. Publish and share the results and learnings afterward to provide transparency.

On that last point, the bottom line is that your initial response should be toward decency and graciousness when you're on-stage (or in the audience, for that matter), even when you know that you're absolutely 100% correct about something being disputed. Don't hesitate to make your point, but seek to understand first before you attack. Otherwise, it's best to be humble and let your ego go whether you're on-stage or in the audience.

Remember that snark may rule on the Internet, but no one likes to see anyone else get humiliated in real life.

There's Safety in Structure



Social structures are all around us. And they're a lifesaver for introverts like me. Photo by [Paul Bica](#) (*creative commons*)

Another common occurrence for shy people is being anxious about how to start conversations. I know this is something that I have trouble with occasionally, sometimes even when I know people relatively well. But I find that it becomes especially difficult in a crowded room filled with folks whom I've never met. I get worried about saying the wrong thing and it just sort of locks me up, both mentally and physically.

Luckily, there's a secret weapon that can really help out here, and it's *not* alcohol; It's *structure*. It won't work for everyone, depending on what drives your anxieties, but it's done wonders for me and I know it can work for others, too.

I have difficulty getting to know people without a structure in place, some sort of system that provides me with a sort of template to facilitate a relationship. A structure gives you clues and hints as to what to say, which takes a lot of the guesswork and fear out of the equation.

For example, my anxieties never bother me at work or when I consult because there's a pre-established system for me to collaborate with others on shared tasks. Meeting people in a situation like that is a cinch because the structure gives you a reason to talk with other people; you don't have to guess nearly as much — you just need to focus on the task at hand. Generally you start conversations like this: *“Hi, I'm your content strategist/inbound marketer – what can I do for you?”* See how easy that is?

In this case, the conversation is very transaction-focused, meaning that you're trading knowledge and bits of information back and forth (in a technical setting, this is generally how-to information and undocumented “tribal knowledge”) so that everyone can succeed in the project you're working on. It involves asking questions, sharing your skills or domain expertise, and generally being a good colleague first before you get to know your work partner(s) as actual human beings.

You might worry that there's going to be stuff that you don't understand or know how to do and you might experience anxiety about expressing your lack of knowledge in some areas. But the best way to get over that fear is to be direct, honest, and upfront whenever you can.

Here's a little something I know from personal experience: *no one's going to think less of you for not knowing something than they will if you pretend to know something you don't.*

The more you make use of them, the more you'll come to realize that these structures for human interaction already exist almost anywhere there's a shared experience or task to be performed. For example, if you volunteer at a food bank, there's a structure for that. If you join a running group, there's a structure for that, too. If you interview for a job, there's quite a bit of structure there as well (ha, maybe too much!).

Once you realize that you're in the presence of structures like these, you can focus on being productive: learning what you need to do to be effective and then actually being effective in the work or effort or whatever the task ends up being. And the magical part is that just by building a shared experience with someone (or a group of someones), you'll notice that your anxiety melts away to a large degree. Because working directly with people makes them familiar instead of strangers. And then you can interact with them much more easily in the future.



Yes, you too can Do Epic Shit — even if you're introverted. Photo by [Marc Berry Reid](#) (*creative commons*)

You can create structures at conferences, too. For example, when I go to the larger mega-conferences (think [SMX Advanced](#), [eTail](#), or [ad:Tech](#)), I try to structure my time and activities as much as possible so as to avoid large groups of unknown people.

One way to do this is by moderating panels or Q&A sessions – that keeps me busy with a dedicated task. Instead of facing a crowd of a thousand people, you're using dealing with just a producer, IT staff member, or a technical director. This is how I got to know [Michelle Robbins](#) at SMX, where we struck up a fun conversation about Battlestar Galactica because [she had a BSG sticker on her laptop](#). See how the structure led to a shared experience, which led to an easy, engaging conversation?

Another good way to take advantage of the structure for an event is to be the facilitator at a “Birds-of-a-Feather” lunch table about some technical subject (this is a great tactic for SMX and eTail, in particular). While it helps to have technical knowledge in the area being covered by the table, your real job as a facilitator is to get *other* people talking, not to show off your expertise. This is like a shy person's dream job — let everyone else fill up the conversational space!

Some conferences (the [IA Summit](#) is famous for this), offer “mentors” for new speakers who can coach them through the event and guide them on how to succeed as a speaker — this gives you a friendly face that you'll recognize at the event because you've been working with them to put together your presentation. It can also help you alleviate your fears and anxiety about being prepared for the event and its audience.

Many conference organizers set up mini-events (tours, outdoor activities, dinners, pub crawls, etc.) outside of the event itself that can help you break the ice and build shared experiences with your other conference-goers. Challenge yourself to take advantage of these opportunities! They're a great way to meet people and break the ice by taking advantage of built-in structures.

If You Don't Plan to Succeed, You're Planning to Fail



The rare TRIPLE FACEPALM featuring Coach K. But what's up with that woman behind him? Is it just a photobomb, or something more nefarious? Photo by [akulawolf](#) (*creative commons*)

Getting control over your fears is essential for shy people. But what if you're introverted? You'll quickly discover that big conferences and other public events take a toll on your energy.

At a typical conference, your schedule goes something like this: there's the early morning registration, then breakfast (if you're lucky — and don't hold out hope for "second breakfast"), then a keynote, then sessions, then lunch, then more sessions, then dinner with attendees, then usually an event at night that goes on for hours. You go to sleep late (and, perhaps, drunk) and then wake up early the next day and do the same thing all over again. the only thing that keeps you going is constant slugs of weak coffee.

And that's just for the *attendees*. If you're a speaker, you'll need to, you know, *SPEAK* at some point. And you'll need to be high-energy, engaging with your audience and being ready for them to ask you anything. You'll need to project confidence and expertise as well

as be intuitive and receptive to your audience's energy and needs.

How is an introvert supposed to deal with all of that energy expenditure?

Conferences, like many other parts of our lives, seem to be designed for the extroverted, who thrive on all of this public activity, open exposure, and talk, talk, talk, talk, TALK. What should introverts do to survive an event like this?

It's simple, really: *plan for your exhaustion in advance*. Create blocks of quiet, disconnected personal time during which you re-charge yourself. Sure, you won't be able to build up the same level of energy as you would by, say, spending the weekend reading, or hiking with your dog, or catching up on a season's worth of *Downton Abbey* on Netflix, but you'll recover enough of your energy to make it through the event.



Conferences drain introverts' batteries worse than a 4G phone. But that's not a problem if you take the time to constantly recharge! Photo by [Viktor Hertz](#) (*creative commons*)

Here are some simple ways for introverts to conserve their energy at conferences and other events:

- **Conserve energy in advance.** Rest up the week before the conference, eat healthy, get exercise, and get your alone time. The strong need for alone time may not be understood by your extroverted friends and colleagues (who will likely be pinging you with their excitement about the approaching event), but stand your ground. If you want to actually *enjoy* the event, you need to be fully energized when you start.
- **Early to bed.** Assuming you're attending a multi-day event (esp. one that

requires travel away from home), you'll experience constant tugging to stay out late and lose out on sleep. Try not to give in to those urges, even if it means missing out on something. Or, if you choose to stay out late, then try to do it on a night where you don't need to be anywhere first thing the next morning. As an introvert, your sleep-time is likely the only time that you have to fully recharge during the event and you should give it up only with great caution.

- **Early to rise.** Assuming you can get to sleep early, getting up early is the best chance that you'll have to avoid the throngs of fellow conference-goers. You can treat yourself to a quiet coffee, reading a newspaper or blogs, or if you're like me (and I am) a walk around some new city you've never experienced before. Getting up and ready early can help reduce your anxieties as well as add to your store of energy for a busy day of people, people, people.
- **Exercise.** While it might not seem intuitive to a lot of folks, exercise is one of the best, most productive ways to build up your energy. A light run, bike ride, city hike, or even climbing stairs in your hotel is a great way to balance your mind and focus your thoughts on your goals for the day. Based on her tweets, I think that [Joanna Lord](#) seems to be particularly good at this when she's traveling. I have a goal to become just as adept.
- **Create goals.** Document a small handful of accomplishments that you want to succeed at during the day. Making a list and checking things off when you get to them help you keep track of your energy output during the day and making sure that you're expending your social energy on the things that matter most. So if you want to shake [Scoble's](#) hand after his keynote, get some coffee with [Margot Bloomstein](#), talk authorship with [AJ Kohn](#) and [Rick DeJarnette](#), catch a drink with [Dan Klyn](#), or ask [Relly Annett-Baker](#) exactly how one should pronounce her first name, you'll do those things first before you lose all your energy.
- **Stay in balance.** There are a lot of bad temptations at conferences and it's all too easy to overdose on any of them: coffee, alcohol, coffee, bad food, coffee, sweets, coffee, more alcohol, and yes, *EVEN MOAR COFFEE*. Falling out of your regular patterns will likely have a negative impact on your energy reserves and willingness to engage with new/more people. So don't give in to them and try to keep to your regular schedules and diet as much as you can. You don't need to be draconian about what you eat or drink — part of the fun of traveling to an event is the opportunity to take in the local culture, food, and drink. Just try to stay in the norms of what you would usually do without going off the deep end. Your diet will always have an effect on your personal/social energy.
- **Go AWOL.** Take a look at the goals you put together for the day. This may be hard to accept, but if they truly represent your priorities then it's perfectly fine to

miss out on other things that don't matter as much. If you've met the people you wanted to meet, seen the sessions that you needed to see, and had the conversations that you needed to have, then it's okay to excuse yourself for the day and just step out. I think of it as "taking French Leave". But it's important to plan this sort of time-out period in advance so that you can make sure that you're not missing something that you need to attend, like a quickly arranged one-off meeting with a services provider to get a demo of their product. Speaking of which...

- **Avoid the expo floor.** Sorry for saying this, events organizers, but your expo floors are like the Ninth Circle of Hell for us introverts. They're made up of narrow corridors with people shouting your name at you, scanning your badge, signing you up for email you don't want, asking invasive questions, and throwing cheap trinkets at you... but they're necessary evils because those vendors and service providers pay for the conference and make it more affordable for the regular attendees. And if you're a speaker who gets your travel and lodging paid for or perhaps an honorarium, guess where those funds come from? But instead of wandering around the expo floor, hack it to your advantage: most conferences publish a list of their sponsors and exhibitors before the show — this makes it easy for you to contact those vendors and service providers in advance, set up private meetings, and get your questions answered and needs met without losing excess energy within the expo itself.
- **Be direct.** One of the most powerful things an introvert can do for an extrovert who won't leave them alone is also the simplest: *just tell them that you're an introvert*. Be transparent and direct about who you are and what your needs are in terms of quiet or alone time. If you're generous, kind, and patient about the way you tell them, then they'll most likely comply with your wishes. This is a new trick for me, but it's worked remarkably well and it feels more intellectually honest and forthright than making up an excuse. You see, I used to be the guy at conferences who was always "just about to come down with a cold, so you'd better stand back." But now I'm the guy who tells the truth about just needing a half-hour to go for a walk right now and I'll catch up with you later. Which one do you respect more?

See any common themes here? A clear one is that *if you don't make time for yourself at an event, no one else will*. So do yourself a favor and make the time. You'll enjoy the event more, get more out of it, and reduce your recovery time once you're back home.

There's Nothing Wrong With You



“You are perfect, just as you are.” — Gaius Baltar. Couldn’t have said it better myself! Photo by [Brisbane City Council](#) (*creative commons*)

If you’re extroverted, you might be reading this and come away thinking that introverts must hate you. And that’s simply not true (well, *most* of the time). Likewise, if you’re not shy, you might be thinking that shy people are silly to focus on all these strange social fears. As in all human relations, it’s hard to step outside of yourself to see life from someone else’s vantage point.

So if you can’t do that, then turn your gaze inward. Because when you look into your heart, you’ll see that everyone’s afraid of *something*... But the corresponding truth is that we all have the capacity to overcome our fears, to make the changes that enable us to meet our goals. And your goal shouldn’t be perfection (which is unattainable, mostly because it doesn’t exist) — instead, your goal should be to constantly evolve your skills and strengths so that you, as an introvert, can survive in this extroverted world.

So if you’re shy or introverted and you think that there’s something wrong with you — something broken that you just can’t seem to fix — you’re wrong. **There’s nothing wrong with you at all.** You are perfect, just as you are, and you’re ready to work your way up to the stage.

With enough hard work and focus, you can be just as good at public speaking as almost anyone you admire at any conference. You have the capacity to influence others with your knowledge, inspire an audience to learn a new subject, and engage with as many new people as you need.

Now that you know how to hack yourself, your audience, and your conferences so as to turn your shyness and introversion into strengths for public speaking, then you've also become aware of a final truth. It's a deeper truth that was, perhaps, previously hidden from your view.

Some of your favorite conference speakers are introverts. Some of presenters that you like the most are very shy in public. Some of them may even be *both*, like me... and we don't let it stop us. Rather, these very traits are the ones that power us forward.

Don't let them stop you, either. Use them as the basis for your strength instead seeing them as a series of barriers that get in your way. Because it's not enough to only exist online, to hide from your fears, to let a low state of social energy determine the entire course of your life. When you don't add your voice to the conversation, everyone loses.

We want to hear your voice. We need you to influence our thinking. And we're waiting for you to speak up.

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59 Responses to *A Guide to Public Speaking for Introverted and Shy People*



Sean says:

January 7, 2013 at 6:54 am

Props Jonathon, this is an excellent post.

[Reply](#)



Marja says:

January 7, 2013 at 11:18 am

I know when we first met, I would never have guessed you were remotely shy. Introverted, too? No way! But, hey, you were using your jedi mind tricks of Improv to hack yourself even then. Thanks for sharing your knowledge!

[Reply](#)



Jonathon Colman says:



January 7, 2013 at 10:47 pm

Thanks for helping me get out more. Even us introvert bloggers need a source of inspiration!

[Reply](#)



Ceri says:

January 7, 2013 at 1:24 pm

Agreed, great post. Good, clear advice and guidance. Thanks for sharing.

[Reply](#)



Martijn Oud says:

January 7, 2013 at 1:44 pm

Thanks for sharing such a personal and inspirational post Jonathon! While I don't expect to have to speak at a conference any time soon — your tips are really encouraging and apply to not just speaking I assume?

[Reply](#)



Jonathon Colman says:

January 9, 2013 at 10:13 pm

That's spot-on, Martjin – they apply to life. Every social interaction can be a challenge for the shy or anxious person or the introvert who's out of energy.

But if you can become adept at managing your every encounters, then you can help ensure that your fears and energy state stop interfering with your goals.

[Reply](#)



Ken Jansen says:

January 7, 2013 at 2:01 pm

Hi Jonathan,

Wonderful stuff. I feel the same way. I need to be 'on' when I present for a listing presentation or some other sales type event. But in non=presentation mode, I would often rather keep to myself or a very small group of friends.

Thanks for reiterating that introversion is not a condition to be cured 😊

Ken

[Reply](#)



Dean says:

January 7, 2013 at 3:17 pm

Hi Jonathon, Another great post! Curious, I just finished the book Quiet, <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/8520610-quiet>. I think you would really like it. Has lots of tidbits on what it means to be introverted and chalk full of studies.

[Reply](#)



Jonathon Colman says:

January 9, 2013 at 10:16 pm

Yes! Susan Cain's book as well as [her TED talk](#) were big sources of inspiration for me, as well as Beth Buelow's [The Introvert Entrepreneur](#). How did you like Susan's book?

There definitely seems to be an increased interest in introversion over the last few years, no doubt tied to the rise of social media. The world's becoming a different sort of place with introverts and technology is changing the way we interact with people. I'm eager to see where things go next!

[Reply](#)



Alex says:

January 18, 2013 at 1:21 pm

Great post, Jonathon! I was going to ask if you had seen her TED talk too. Loved it. I am currently #237 on the wait list for Quiet at the Seattle Public Library – and have been on the list for two months already. Hmmmm... .

[Reply](#)



Jonathon Colman says:

January 18, 2013 at 1:50 pm

Yes! Her TED talk and book are both awesome. Think you'll really like the book... when you can get it! 😊

[Reply](#)



[Lauren Hall-Stigerts](#) says:

January 7, 2013 at 4:10 pm

Thanks for sharing your entertaining, hard-learned, and transparent experiences, Jon. I empathize – I had a crash course in introversion when I married my husband. Going to parties together before I understood what it was about was pretty comical. (Note: I'm an extrovert, and was even more extroverted when we met 10 years ago.)

First of all, taking him to parties required dragging. Not kicking and screaming, mind you – more passively “OK yeah sure, let's meet your weird anime friends”.

We'd arrive at the party and I'd frolic around, giving everyone hugs and smiles, while I felt him withdraw into a corner and stand there. Maybe for an hour.

As an extrovert, I (mis)interpreted this as “MAYDAY MAYDAY, SHIP SINKING. REALLY SAD. HAVING A HORRIBLE TIME.” So I, wanting everyone to be happy (*especially* my boyfriend), would freak out and pull away from everyone to try to cheer him up. This made him withdraw into his shell even further. It was like an emotional chinese finger trap for me: the more I tried, the more I couldn't figure out why he was withdrawn.

A few years, a dozen large social events, and several intense conversations later, I learned that his version of having fun in a big group is observing and then finding the right 1:1 conversation to engage in. It's quite different from my Social Butterfly With Rainbow Wings Who Wants To Land On Everyone's Shoulder tendencies.

After five years of conventions and conferences, and really burning out my own extroversion batteries hardcore, I've come to appreciate the introverted ways of doing things. And I'm much better at translating others because of it.

As a side note, I just want to nom all of the vivid images you seem to find for your posts. You share that talent (as well as others) with Rand. Photo mojo!

[Reply](#)



[Jonathon Colman](#) says:

January 9, 2013 at 10:22 pm

I'm going to remember your metaphor there: the emotional Chinese finger trap. That's so scarily accurate – would you mind if I use that image in the future?

I've experienced the same thing as your husband in social settings. In a room full of people I don't know, I usually don't want to stand out and tend to keep to myself. When someone's focusing on me too much, I get nervous and jumpy, too.

It's so cool that you and Kevin have been able to come to an understanding about each other's needs and adapt. That kind of steady evolution – and your storytelling of it – helps introverts and extroverts alike!

[Reply](#)



Lauren Hall-Stigerts says:

January 11, 2013 at 2:40 pm

Yes, you can most certainly use that image of an emotional Chinese finger trap! I'd be honored if it made it into one of your blog posts or presentation slides. 😊

[Reply](#)



Jason Nelson says:

January 7, 2013 at 10:24 pm

Thanks for sharing Jonathon. Neil Patel's article on public speaking is worth a read as well. <http://www.quicksprout.com/2012/12/03/how-to-speak-in-public-even-if-you-hate-public-speaking/>

[Reply](#)



mamaJ says:

January 8, 2013 at 10:59 am

Great article JC! I'm a fan of your presentations.

[Reply](#)



Dave Lindahl says:

January 8, 2013 at 1:12 pm

I've thought of myself as both shy and introverted for a lot of my life, but when I've mentioned that to my friends or even random people I meet at events they look at me like I'm crazy. Like, "quit being so humble, Dave, you know you're really a social person! you're not introverted or even (God forbid) shy!" I've learned that despite how self conscious I may feel at a certain time, the reality is that if you're a decent person most people want to see you succeed. Everybody hates uncomfortable and awkward moments and if you take some deep breaths and really just let you be you it's amazing what you can get through and how it will be perceived from the outside.. However, if you depend on simply that, it helps to speak about what you know. I think a lot of subject matter experts out there that look like good speakers are more accurately just building great decks that keep them on task. Deep down they know what to say because they've probably already said it or written about it a dozen times before and the words come out almost reactively.

That said... I do still tend to fear getting out there and just doing this kind of stuff. Thanks for the inspirational content here, Jonathon. Honest, thoughtful, and very helpful. 😊

[Reply](#)



Jonathon Colman says:

January 9, 2013 at 10:29 pm

Ha, I know exactly what you mean. People see me give a talk and they're incredulous when I fade into the background afterward. When I asked about it, I claim it has to do with being one quarter Ninja on my grandmother's side.

And you're on to something here about repetition. When I'm building out a deck, I go over the words several times. Maybe hundreds or thousands. I examine the pauses, the beats, the story arc, the humor, the sources, the data. I think it's the introversion that allows me to dive so deep and experience this sort of flow.

In some ways, it's a wonderful experience... just getting lost in the construction of a story. But in other ways, it's sort of weird to snap out of it and realize that it's 2 in the morning. 😊

[Reply](#)



Christian Marie Herron says:

January 8, 2013 at 1:46 pm

Great information Jonathan and as a fellow introvert I resonated with everything mentioned here!

As you explained, public speaking can be tough for introverts but as you mentioned, there are many tips and tricks that can be used to both prepare and soothe us. Like you, many don't believe that I am introvert because of a certain confidence that I project. This only came about after years of practice and trying out different things. One other suggestion I'd like to mention is that if at all possible, especially for novice, introverted public speakers, pairing up to present can be a wonderful way to help take the pressure off. Pairing up with a more experienced public speaker or someone who actually enjoys public speaking (!?) can be a tremendous learning opportunity for the less experienced. I used this technique many times until I felt ready to go present solo.

We need to keep getting information out there that there is nothing wrong with us. This is exactly my mission 😊

[Reply](#)



Jonathon Colman says:

January 9, 2013 at 10:31 pm

I love the idea of working with a more experienced and/or more relaxed fellow speaker. The sorts of coordination, planning, and trust involved with that can be taxing for an introvert, but for a shy or anxious person I think it could relieve a lot of the burden.

And I'm glad you're joining me on this quest to tell the World that there's nothing wrong with introverts, nothing broken, nothing amiss. As we get to know ourselves, so can we get to know others, too.

[Reply](#)

Pingback: [Marketing Day: January 8, 2013](#)



Charles Sipe says:

January 9, 2013 at 12:55 am

Being an introvert and shy, the idea of public speaking to a large audience seems really intimidating but less so after reading this. Thanks for the inspiration. I am looking forward to trying some of the social hacks.

[Reply](#)



Jonathon Colman says:

January 9, 2013 at 10:35 pm

Thanks for your comment, Charles. Have you found that blogging helps at all with reducing intimidation and building up confidence? It's helped me quite a bit, though I must say that I still find presenting to be easier than writing. Maybe as I continue building out stories here that will change.

Would love any tips that you might have to share!

[Reply](#)



Patrick says:

January 9, 2013 at 1:58 am

Really good post, thanks for that. I admire how you worked on yourself and try to push your limits. However I'm not sure I like the fact that introverts try to figure out ways how to appear more extroverted. In some cases like a presentation it makes sense. But in others.. I don't know. Makes it even harder for other introverts as the whole world seems to be extroverted.

[Reply](#)



Jonathon Colman says:

January 9, 2013 at 10:41 pm

I know what you mean. When I wrote that, I felt the bank of mental klaxons and alarms go off. I even said out loud to myself, "*WHAT? You're telling them that you're not being authentic?!*"

I try to make up for that later on in the post with the note about how introverts can be direct with extroverts and just simply tell them that they're introverted and need a little while to recharge.

Bottom line is that I think there's some balance here between taking care of yourself, overcoming your fears, and learning how to structure your time/energy use with being accountable for who you are and how you interact with others. And even that balance is going to differ person by person. *Different strokes for different folks*, as they say.

I'm striving for more authenticity now in my encounters and interactions, and your note here helps remind me as to why that's so important. Because we do live in an extroverted world, but that world still needs our true voices anyway.

[Reply](#)



Jordan Kasteler says:

January 9, 2013 at 11:42 am

I highly appreciate reading this post as it's very relevant to me. As a shy introvert I was terrified of public speaking. I wrote about it 3 years ago here

<http://www.searchenginejournal.com/public-speaking-in-the-internet-marketing-industry/16434/>

[Reply](#)



Jonathon Colman says:

January 9, 2013 at 10:43 pm

Wow, thanks for sharing that post, Jordan – it's great! I especially love your point about reacting to the audience. Crowds love that sort of meta-awareness and too few speakers remember that presenting is all about the give-and-take. Well done!

[Reply](#)



Paddy Moogan says:

January 9, 2013 at 9:34 pm

Thanks for sharing this Jon, I felt myself nodding along to a lot of your points. I admire your honesty too, not many people would admit to their own weaknesses but that's part of the way towards overcoming them.

I consider myself to be quite a shy person and when I was younger, I'd never have imagined I'd stand on a stage in front of 800+ people. People who know me from my childhood can't believe I do that kind of stuff – I'm sure my parents think I exaggerate how many people I've spoken in front of 😊

[Reply](#)



Jonathon Colman says:

January 9, 2013 at 10:48 pm

Oddly enough, I was just thinking about you while I was out walking my dog. I remembered [your great talk at MozCon](#) and how now you were all the way down in NZ and I wondered if you were introverted and how that might affect your work, writing and speaking. And here you are commenting on this post! *Weird.*

Anyhow, you're living proof of what I'm trying to illustrate in this post: shy people can overcome their fears. Introverted people can create energy just as well as extroverts. And both can do incredible work, tell truly engaging stories, and captivate an audience from a stage. And now I can see how your MozCon talk was a great example of all that in action.

I'm looking forward to seeing you speak again. That is, assuming we ever get you back from Middle Earth.

[Reply](#)

Pingback: [The 5 Business Actions for a Profitable 2013 | Overit Blog](#)

Pingback: [The 5 Business Actions for a Profitable 2013 | Overit Blog](#)

Pingback: [Final Lap: Top Reads for Week Ending Jan. 11 | Pole Position Marketing](#)



David Giacomo says:

January 11, 2013 at 1:25 pm

Thanks Jonathon,

Another shy & introvert here. I actually do not do public speaking but i suffer most when doing small talk with strangers and when I go to some smaller conferences. It was quite interesting to read this now, since one of my objectives for 2013 is to try to improve a lot on my confidence and small talk. I have heard that the toastmaster's program is a very good way of improving public speaking skills and gain confidence in being able to communicate well with others.

One thing that has worked well for me is to be aware that there are many more shy people around (even if they may not seem so), so the way I feel is probably very similar to how many people around me also feel. That makes me feel less pressured and less socially anxious. I also am very aware that us shy people are too observant on what we do and how we act, so we have a hard time concentrating on the conversation... then the conversation does not go well ... and we have the self fulfilling prophecy. Being aware of this fact helps me a lot to try to concentrate on the other person instead of myself.

Thank you for our post and encouragement. I hope going through the toastmasters program, gives me the push i need to feel less anxious in these situations.

[Reply](#)



Wendy Mills says:

January 11, 2013 at 2:00 pm

Kudos to you Jonathon!

This post is also very relevant to me, and I would like to congratulate you on your courage to push through the fear and just do it!

I joined Toastmasters, which is a step in the right direction, and provides a safe place to practice and screw up. And your post certainly leaves me with more to think about.

Thank you! ~W

[Reply](#)



Lauren Hall-Stigerts says:

January 11, 2013 at 2:45 pm

Yay, Toastmasters! Way to go, Wendy! I joined for a while until I got overwhelmed with work stuff. Super helpful, and I had such a supportive group. Have fun!

[Reply](#)



Chris Irwin says:

January 11, 2013 at 11:54 pm

Thank you Jonathon. Some absolutely fantastic advice on public speaking. It is a wonderful skill to master, As Wendy says Toastmasters is definitely a safe place to practice as there is a group of other people also looking to improve their speaking and leadership skills. The theory is great but the best way to master public speaking is doing it and the best way to do it is to join a local Toast Masters Club.

[Reply](#)



David Giacomo says:

January 14, 2013 at 9:15 am

Thanks @Wendy, @Lauren, @Chris for your encouragement. Tomorrow I am going for the first day.... I am no looking forward to itm but i know i need to get it done.

Wendy, you are right... I am joining because i think that nothig will happen if I screw up, so i think this will take a lot of the pressure out & will let me focus on the public speaking & gain confidence.

Thanks!

[Reply](#)



shashank says:

January 12, 2013 at 2:01 pm

IMO this is true for most of intellectual introverts :

Myth #1 – Introverts don't like to talk.

This is not true. Introverts just don't talk unless they have something to say. They hate small talk. Get an introvert talking about something they are interested in, and they won't shut up for days.

Myth #2 – Introverts are shy.

Shyness has nothing to do with being an Introvert. Introverts are not necessarily afraid of people. What they need is a reason to interact. They don't interact for the sake of interacting. If you want to talk to an Introvert, just start talking. Don't worry about being polite.

Myth #3 – Introverts are rude.

Introverts often don't see a reason for beating around the bush with social pleasantries. They want everyone to just be real and honest. Unfortunately, this is not acceptable in most settings, so Introverts can feel a lot of pressure to fit in, which they find exhausting.

Myth #4 – Introverts don't like people.

On the contrary, Introverts intensely value the few friends they have. They can count their close friends on one hand. If you are lucky enough for an introvert to consider you a friend, you probably have a loyal ally for life. Once you have earned their respect as being a person of substance, you're in.

Myth #5 – Introverts don't like to go out in public.

Nonsense. Introverts just don't like to go out in public FOR AS LONG. They also like to avoid the complications that are involved in public activities. They take in data and experiences very quickly, and as a result, don't need to be there for long to "get it." They're ready to go home, recharge, and process it all. In fact, recharging is absolutely crucial for Introverts.

Myth #6 – Introverts always want to be alone.

Introverts are perfectly comfortable with their own thoughts. They think a lot. They daydream. They like to have problems to work on, puzzles to solve. But they can also get incredibly lonely if they don't have anyone to share their discoveries with. They crave an authentic and sincere connection with ONE PERSON at a time.

Myth #7 – Introverts are weird.

Introverts are often individualists. They don't follow the crowd. They'd prefer to be valued for their novel ways of living. They think for themselves and because of that, they often challenge the norm. They don't make most decisions based on what is popular or trendy.

Myth #8 – Introverts are aloof nerds.

Introverts are people who primarily look inward, paying close attention to their thoughts and emotions. It's not that they are incapable of paying attention to what is going on around them, it's just that their inner world is much more stimulating and rewarding to them.

Myth #9 – Introverts don't know how to relax and have fun.

Introverts typically relax at home or in nature, not in busy public places. Introverts are not thrill seekers and adrenaline junkies. If there is too much talking and noise going on, they shut down. Their brains are too sensitive to the neurotransmitter called Dopamine. Introverts and Extroverts have different dominant neuro-pathways. Just look it up.

Myth #10 – Introverts can fix themselves and become Extroverts.

Introverts cannot "fix themselves" and deserve respect for their natural temperament and contributions to the human race. In fact, one study (Silverman, 1986) showed that the percentage of Introverts increases with IQ.

[Reply](#)



Desley Cowley says:

January 12, 2013 at 4:21 pm

Well worth taking the time to read. Good advice for anyone!

[Reply](#)



euhero says:

January 13, 2013 at 12:26 pm

Wow, That was a really long read. I got so much information here to hack myself. I will surely be following your blog for now on. This was just a good read while having my coffee. I think you just gave me confidence to be a better public speaker.

[Reply](#)



Rebecca Pitman says:

January 17, 2013 at 5:45 am

As someone who dreads large conferences/events, I found this article informative and useful. You write very amusingly about social anxiety – I laughed out loud several times. Thank you!

[Reply](#)

Pingback: [*The road to influence. Be Liked. Be Trusted. - Hit Reach*](#)



Claire Duffy says:

January 28, 2013 at 11:17 pm

This is a great piece – so thorough and frank, thank you for sharing. I will link it to a post of my own. <http://wp.me/p2k3hy-PH>

[Reply](#)

Pingback: [*Grow Your Brand – Always Be Consolidating \(ABC\) - Hit Reach*](#)



christine says:

February 14, 2013 at 6:45 pm

Wow, I love your openness, vulnerability and honesty. yes this too is an introverts trait, which takes a lot of courage. loved hearing about how you feel. I have the ‘me too’ , and it helps. Thank you for sharing your inner self Jonathon.

[Reply](#)

Pingback: [*Snapshot 2.20.13 | Little Big*](#)



Sean Fullerton says:

February 25, 2013 at 3:24 am

Another great post Jon, I've been digging around with this all morning since reading your interview with Beth Buelow earlier...not that I need much excuse for procrastinating with work anyway! Can you recommend any books on introversion and how to deal with it?

Cheers,

Sean

[Reply](#)



Jonathon Colman says:

February 25, 2013 at 4:29 am

I'm a big fan of [Beth Buelow's](#) and [Susan Cain's](#) books and there are plenty of others out there. You might also check out [this excellent piece](#) from *The Atlantic* and blogs like [Psychology Today](#).

All that said, try to move away from "dealing with" introversion. One of the last points I made in [my Ignite! Seattle talk](#) was that we introverts need to stop being so hard on ourselves. So take it easy – you're doing great! 😊

[Reply](#)



Sean Fullerton says:

February 25, 2013 at 4:57 am

Thanks Jon, I really appreciate you taking the time out to source those links.

Yeah fair point. I suppose what I'm trying to say is if I can better understand my traits and anxieties I'll be better able to develop workarounds for them and probably more importantly, a bit more comfortable with the way I am if I know I'm not on my own.

Thanks again for the links, I've bookmarked them for later but I really need to get back to work!

[Reply](#)



Allison Menjivar says:

February 25, 2013 at 6:41 am

Excellent post! I'm still coming to grips with being both shy and introverted so the more I read others' experiences, the more accepting I am of myself. Acceptance being a huge step in learning how to work within an extroverts world. I particularly love your advice on surviving conferences, and will be putting it to good use. Thank you!

[Reply](#)



Stacey King Gordon says:

February 25, 2013 at 8:16 pm

Jonathon – Thanks so much for this post. It's fantastic. I suspect I'll be reading it over and over again during the next week as this introvert prepares for two big speaking engagements at an upcoming New York conference. I *really* appreciate you sharing it and providing the great tips.

Stacey

[Reply](#)



Jonathon Colman says:

February 25, 2013 at 8:22 pm

Good luck Stacey, glad this is helpful. But I'm a big fan of your work and I know you're going to rock it. Wish I were there to cheer you on, but your fellow introverts will stand with you.

[Reply](#)

Pingback: [El mes interessant, febrer 2013 - Gecofor](#)



Mike McMillen says:

May 17, 2013 at 10:08 pm

I am extremely introverted and always thought I was shy. Despite education & expertise in my field (construction management), my career really stalled because of my total inability to speak up in meetings & present proposals to clients. I joined Toastmasters in 2000. TM did more for my career than an MBA. I have recently taught several classes in project management to about 20 people; an impossible feat before TM.

Go Toastmasters. org to find a club. You will find a very supportive environment – which is critical for introverts or shy people. I learned that people enjoy hearing speak, & that I can make them laugh – with me, not at me, which I had always feared.

[Reply](#)

Pingback: [So you want to speak at a conference.... | kate{mats}](#)

Pingback: [Abigail Phillips | The Introverted PhD Student *](#)

Pingback: [Listly List - J Colman Content Audit](#)



Anonymouse Introvert says:

August 18, 2013 at 6:45 am

Hi,

You can probably guess from my name that I am an introvert. Thanks for sharing your knowledge on this, because I believe that its going to be an immense help to me right now. On my one and only visit to a developed nation(around Europe) , my mind fell prey to the hatred and discriminating eyes of native population. I felt so humiliated (and very sad from inside) that from that day my introversion and shyness knew no bounds. No complains though, I wish good for one and all 😊

[Reply](#)

Pingback: [For Shy and Introverts : Guide to Transform Yourself](#)
