
Introvert or an Extrovert: Using Personality Types
to Prevent Stress and Replenish Your Energy

By Debra Holland, Ph.D

During the last three weeks, I've worked long hours at consulting jobs for two different companies, which both suffered the tragic loss of an employee; gave trainings to organizations several hours from my home; counseled clients in my suddenly exploding private therapy practice; and scrambled to find new office space, and move because my old office building was being torn down. By the end of last week, I hit a wall of fatigue. I'd drained myself mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

All during this time, the light at the end of the crazy, busy tunnel was a weekend retreat at my cabin in the mountains at Big Bear Lake. I planned to leave Friday morning and return Monday afternoon. I looked forward to not talking to *anyone* and having the luxury to follow my own inclinations.

I'd scheduled the vacation two months earlier, when I'd been booked to teach a workshop in Redlands at the foot of the mountain at 7 a.m. on Friday morning. Part of my working so hard to get my office moved was because I did not want to give up my retreat and unpack over the weekend.

I worked late on Thursday, seeing clients, then drove home to finish paperwork and pack. After four and a half hours of sleep, I drove to Redlands, using the last of my energy to teach the session. Afterwards, I drove up the mountain, unloaded the car, and crawled into bed for a long nap. The rest of the day, I took it easy, spending a lot of time in bed reading, or writing on my laptop, although I did go outside to water the yard, admiring the flowers, trees, and bushes, and swept off the deck.

The next morning, I made a cup of tea and sat on the couch, looking out over the lake. Later, I knew the wind would kick up, churning the water, and the sounds of the speedboats and Seadoos would resonate through the air. But in the still of the morning, the lake was as smooth as glass, with an occasional boat putting by. As I sat there, drinking my tea and soaking up the beautiful scene, I could feel energy flow into my body. The idea for this article came to me.

But I wasn't ready to write. Instead, I went back to bed and read a 2006 issue of *Traditional Home*. (We keep old magazines that we love at the cabin.) In viewing the beautiful homes, gardens, furniture, and fabrics, I could feel creativity well up in me; I felt like a parched plant soaking up water.

After reading another couple of articles, I put the magazine down, picked up my laptop and began to write this newsletter. I wanted to share with my readers the importance of taking time for themselves in a way that replenishes, instead of drains, their energy.

For you see, I'm an introvert. I'm an *outgoing* introvert, who's good with people, but I need solitude and solitary activities to replenish my energy. If I were an extrovert, I would have invited family or friends for the weekend because being with people would energize me.

Knowing what personality type you are makes a difference in decreasing your stress levels and helping you recharge your mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual batteries. If you do activities that are the opposite of what you need, you might enjoy yourself, but you won't necessarily refill your energy. You might even feel more tired.

So, how do you know if you're an introvert or an extrovert? Ask yourself this question: Do I replenish my energy through solitary activities or through people activities?

Just because you love to spend time with your spouse and children doesn't make you an extrovert. For example, I love doing things with my partner, Don, but I still need to find time to take a nap or read. When we're on vacations and together 24/7, I coax him to take a nap with me, or send him off to do something on his own while I sleep. At night, after he falls asleep, I'll read for 20 to 30 minutes.

Don is more extroverted and is great about making plans to do fun things. He learned to accept my introverted side, even if he doesn't always like it. In turn, I try to do my replenishing when he's not around, so when we're together, I enjoy the time with him.

Extroverts love to get together with their friends after work or on weekends. They often try to drag their introverted spouses or friends with them, believing it will be "good" for them. Extroverts often think something is wrong with those who like to be alone.

Once you know if you're introverted or extroverted, then you can start scheduling your week to include activities that revitalize you. It doesn't have to take much time. For example, during lunchtime at work, an extrovert could invite a friend or friends to eat with her. An introvert could close his office door and read a book while he eats.

If you and your partner are opposites, then you regularly need to communicate your needs. Perhaps the introvert agrees to go to a party with the extrovert, but sets a time limit. Maybe one night, you both do introverted things, like work in the garden, and another night invite friends over for dinner. Or the extrovert goes to the party alone, and the introvert stays home.

Balance is the key--both for your own well-being, and to improve and enhance the important relationships in your life. Carve out time to meet your own energy needs and respect the ways those around you replenish. You will find yourself feeling less stressed and happier.

Dr. Debra