

Against Conventional Wisdom: Lessons from *Quiet* and *Mastering the Art of Quitting*  
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#### Speaker notes

slide 2] Why put these two books together? They both pull together an impressive amount of research. They both describe distinct cultural biases and how we may be missing out on opportunities for creativity and effectiveness if we go along with them.

slide 3] In *Quiet*, Susan Cain tells the story of the evolution of the extrovert ideal. She describes how in concert with the rise of industrialization in the United States, we transformed from a “Culture of Character” in the 19th century in which the highest values were discipline, reserve, and honor, to a “Culture of Personality” in the 20th century in which it was more important to be bold, sociable, and entertaining. She contrasts self-help guides and advertisements from these eras to support her claims. She notes how in the first half of the 20th century, psychology became increasingly preoccupied with confidence and extroversion. By 1950, the slogan of the Mid-Century White House Conference on Children and Youth was “A healthy personality for every child.” Today, salesmanship is considered a necessary virtue for success in life. For example, we have “a business culture in which verbal fluency and sociability are the two most important predictors of success, according to a Stanford Business School study that Cain references (p. 48). This extrovert ideal is cultural: “Chinese high school students tell researchers that they prefer friends who are “humble” and “altruistic,” “honest” and “hardworking,” while American high school students seek out the “cheerful,” “enthusiastic,” and “sociable” (Cain, p. 187).

In *Mastering the Art of Quitting*, Strep and Bernstein argue that persistence and optimism are fundamental to American mythology. They hypothesize that tenacity has long been the “backbone of the American Dream.” They quote many common sayings: “I think I can, I think I can”; “winners never quit and quitters never win”; “if at first you don’t succeed, try, try again”---there are many. Even the dictionary definition for “quitter” is colored with moral judgment---“one who gives up too easily.” However, not only is there a cultural bias that favors persistence, but also a bias toward persistence in how our brains process information. One example is our propensity to see the “near win”: when people fall just shy of their goal, they tend to see it as a near win, rather than a loss or a failure. In some situations (like a game of baseball), the near win can be a good predictor of future success. However, a British study on gambling found that when it comes to our brains, a near win at the slot machine activates pleasure and reward centers almost as much as an actual win. The near win kept people playing even though in actuality it was a loss and was a useless predictor of a future win. Near wins reinforce wishful thinking and can keep us persisting past the point when we should stop. The authors reference other habits of mind, like the availability heuristic, intermittent reinforcement, the escalation of commitment, the sunk-cost fallacy, and loss aversion as further evidence of how our psychology reinforces persistence.

slide 4] Susan Cain includes this quiz in her introduction. Most of us already have ideas about introverts and extroverts---guess which type is more likely to do the things listed here [Use handout].

slide 5] How correct were you? Did anyone get the final question right? (It’s sort of a “gotcha” question).

slide 6] Play video at [http://www.ted.com/talks/susan\\_cain\\_the\\_power\\_of\\_introverts?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/susan_cain_the_power_of_introverts?language=en) from 2:30 - 5:05. [skipped at Conference because of time limitations but it's a great video!].

slide 7] So are you an introvert or an extrovert? Do the activity in the right column on the first side of the handout. [Directions on slide].

slide 8] What about introverted leaders? It turns out we might have some cultural biases about what makes a leader. Studies in group dynamics show that we perceive talkers to have these characteristics. We perceive quick talkers to be more capable and more appealing still!

slide 9] However, Cain references a study by management theorist Jim Collins that demonstrated that leaders of many of the best-performing companies of the late twentieth century were described as

- quiet
- humble
- modest
- reserved
- shy
- gracious
- mild-mannered
- self-effacing
- understated (Cain, p. 54-55).

This study was unique in that it looked at actual results of leadership for these companies. Cain notes that studies linking extroversion and leadership are often based on people's perceptions of who made a good leader, as opposed to actual results.

slide 10] Cain describes a study by management professor Adam Grant that found that introverts are uniquely good at leading initiative-takers:

"163 college students are divided into competing teams charged with folding as many t-shirts as possible in 10 minutes. Each team secretly included two actors. In some teams, the actors acted passively, following the leaders instructions. In other teams, one of the actors said, "I wonder if there's a more efficient way to do this." The other actor replied that he had a friend from Japan who had a faster way to fold shirts. "It might take a minute or two to teach you, the actor told the leader, "but do we want to try it?"

The results:

- Introverted leaders were 20% more likely to follow the suggestion and their teams had 24% better results than the teams of extroverted leaders
- In teams where all followers simply followed instructions, however, the teams led by extroverts outperformed those led by introverts by 22%

slide 11] Researcher Anders Ericsson studied elite violinists at a music academy in Berlin. Professors divided their students into three groups: the best performers, the good performers, and those training to teach. They interviewed the students and asked them to keep diaries of their music-related activity. All three groups spent the same amount of time in music-related activities but the two best groups spent most of their music-related time practicing in solitude: 24.3 hours per week for the best group vs. 9.3 hours per week for the worst group (Cain, p. 80).

Deliberate practice leads to exceptional achievement and it is best conducted alone.

This finding holds true for other experts:

- chess players
- college students
- elite athletes (Cain, p. 81).

DeMarco and Lister, work environment consultants, studied programmers and found that those who worked best were those who had the most privacy, personal space, control over their physical environments, and freedom from interruption.

slide 12] “Most inventors and engineers I’ve met are like me---they’re shy and they live in their heads. They’re almost like artists. In fact, the very best of them are artists. And artists work best alone where they can control an invention’s design without a lot of other people designing it for marketing or some other committee. I don’t believe anything really revolutionary has been invented by committee. If you’re that rare engineer who’s an inventor and also an artist, I’m going to give you some advice that might be hard to take. That advice is: Work alone. You’re going to be best able to design revolutionary products and features if you’re working on your own. Not on a committee. Not on a team.” -Steve Wozniak, quoted by Cain on p. 73-74.

slide 13] There’s evidence that introverts are more sensitive than extroverts to various kinds of stimulation and that [they] often need very different levels of stimulation to function at their best.

In a well-known experiment from 1967, research psychologist Hans Eysenck found that introverts salivated more when lemon juice was placed on their tongues.

Cain also mentions a 1984 experiment published by Russell G. Geen in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*:

Introverts and extroverts were asked to play a challenging word game in which they had to learn, through trial and error, the governing principle of the game. While playing, they wore headphones that emitted random bursts of noise. They were asked to adjust the volume of their headsets up or down to the level that was “just right.” On average, the extroverts chose a noise level of 72 decibels, while the introverts selected only 55 decibels. When working at a volume they had selected the two types were equally aroused (as measured by their heart rates and other indicators). They also played equally well. When the introverts were asked to work at the noise level preferred by the extroverts and vice-versa, everything changed. Not only were the introverts over-aroused by the loud noise, but they also underperformed---taking an average of 9.1 trials rather than 5.8 to learn the game. The opposite was true for the extroverts---they were under-aroused (and possibly bored) by the quieter conditions, and took an average of 7.3 trials, compared with the 5.4 they’d averaged under noisier conditions (Cain, p. 124).

slide 14] Susan Cain describes a professor who would hide in the restroom for an hour to give himself a break after a big lecture event. He called the place that you go to recharge a “restorative niche.”

“We would all be better off if, before accepting a new job, if we evaluated the presence or absence of restorative niches as carefully as we considered the family leave policy or health plans.”

Psychology researcher Marvin Dunnette studied brainstorming and found that group brainstorming does not work as well as solitary brainstorming. The subjects produced more ideas and ideas of equal or

higher quality when working individually (Cain, p. 88). ---Please brainstorm individually for 5 minutes: what are your restorative niches? If you don't have any, how might you cultivate them? [Handout, side one, left column]

slide 15] Just like there are cultural biases against extroversion, there are also cultural biases against quitting. Take a moment to fill out your Persistence Profile. [Handout, side two, left column].

Streep and Bernstein share many stories of people who quit: whether it be a relationship or a career change. In one instance, they share Jill's story. It took her 13 years to quit the practice of law. She went to law school almost by default after graduating from college. She wasn't passionate about being a lawyer but she was good at it. They quote Jill, "I know it sounds crazy, but it was the worst possible career choice for me because I hate arguing. I knew that from the start. But I'd invested so much time becoming a lawyer and then working that it was hard to even think about quitting, and besides, I couldn't envision any alternatives. So I kept going." Eventually, the management offered partners in the firm part-time, and then rescinded that offer after Jill leapt at it: she then had a choice to stay or leave. She decided to leave, giving a year's notice for the transition. She went back to school for a master's degree in education and now teaches science classes. She's now happier in her work and work-life balance.

Mastering the art of quitting includes the redirection of thoughts, feelings, and energy toward a new goal or goals, as well as strategies for their achievement. Take a moment to find out your Quitting Aptitude and do the activity on this slide [Handout, side two, right column].

slide 16] The book doesn't promote quitting as a standalone answer. If quitting isn't accompanied by new goals, it's not an answer at all. But perhaps we need to focus less on the value of persistence and more on the nature of the goals we set for ourselves and encourage in others. Quitting consciously and thoughtfully brings a new perspective. One respondent to their questionnaire, a 30-year-old man, wrote of his own experience dropping out of college twice and then becoming a college teacher: "It has changed my views because quitting something is often an attempt to affirm something larger that we can't quite grasp. And while I find it frustratingly negative to hear people phrase their decisions in terms of quitting, I now try to listen instead to the positive move they are struggling to make that they don't yet have the words to express" (Streep and Bernstein, p. 213).

slide 17] Let's make room for innovation in ourselves and in our institutions.