

PROGRAM SUMMARY

2014 Fall Speaker 50th Anniversary Event: Susan Cain

Holton-Arms School

October 7, 2014



Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking

Susan Cain

Download [5 Tips for Raising a Quietly Strong Child flyer \(PDF\)](#)

by Susan Cain.

See photos of the event [here](#).

WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

Parents Council of Washington (PCW) President Joan Levy welcomed attendees including past PCW Presidents, current and former PCW Board Members, Heads of Schools, students, teachers, parents and members of the general public and thanked the Holton-Arms School for hosting the special 50th anniversary event and its Parent Association, Parents Council Representatives, Head of School, security and theater tech staff for their work in connection with the evening program. Ms. Levy then introduced Holton-Arms' Head of School, Ms. Susanna A. Jones, who also welcomed everyone and thanked the audience for their interest in such an important topic that allows a better understanding of the breadth of students schools work with every day.

HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS AND EVENING SPONSORS

Ms. Levy highlighted a few historical facts about the organization stating that it was founded fifty years ago at Holton-Arms led by Jean Douglas Wallace as a response to common concerns about the safety, health and best interests of children and families. PCW continues to provide parents support, education and guidelines today on pertinent issues by connecting schools, sharing ideas and engaging parents.

Ms. Levy graciously thanked the anniversary committee and former PCW board members for their work on the event with PCW Board Members and Anniversary Program Co-Chairs Fran Barnes and Shelley Gunner, PrepMatters for their generous sponsorship and friendship and renowned local chefs José Andrés of ThinkFood Group, Nora Pouillon of Restaurant Nora, John Snedden of Rocklands Barbeque and Grill Co. and RobertWeidmaier of RW Restaurnat Group for their talent, time and food donations for the opening reception.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER INTRODUCTION

Ms. Levy introduced PCW Board Member and Anniversary Program Co-Chair Shelley Gunner who shared that between one-third to one-half of the population in the United

States is considered to be introverted preferring to listen rather than speak and to work independently instead of in teams. However, our culture often does not recognize their contributions and talents tending to reward students who participate in class or who make an impression.

Ms. Gunner opened the introduction of the evening's keynote speaker, Susan Cain, the *New York Times* bestselling author of Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking by stating that the book has been translated into thirty-six languages, named the #1 Book of the Year by *Fast Company* magazine and the subject of a *Time* cover story. Quiet has also been required reading for faculty at area schools and a "go-to" book for therapists for introverted teens on the issue of celebrating differences. Ms. Cain's TED Talk has been viewed over 9 million times and is considered to be one of Bill Gates' favorites.

In addition to her work on Quiet, Ms. Cain has been named one of the top 50 leadership experts by *Inc.* and her writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *O, The Oprah Magazine* and online at *Salon.com*, *Time.com* and *PsychologyToday.com*.

Ms. Gunner noted that PCW seeks to provide speakers who have an impact on how we raise our children and how we teach them in our schools. Ms. Cain has had just such an impact.

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION – THE QUIET REVOLUTION

The Extrovert Ideal – Its Impact on Introverts and Society

Ms. Cain thanked PCW and commented on how much she has enjoyed learning about its work. She began by remarking that from her earliest memories, she was aware of the differences between those Carl Jung termed "introverts" and "extroverts." She described introverts and extroverts and the fact that we live in a culture of extroverts. Sharing a personal story, she explained how the Quiet Revolution came to be in the first place. At

nine years old, Ms. Cain traveled to summer camp with a suitcase full of books. Upon arriving, the counselors taught the campers a loud cheer. Leaving the suitcase of books behind, she tried all summer to be gregarious and bold to integrate with the others and meet expectations. She continued this effort throughout her childhood and young adulthood even becoming a lawyer instead of the writer she wanted to be. She finally understood she was making a mistake and was acting out of character and not being true to herself. She ultimately embraced her introverted side. Millions of people all over the world are making this same mistake because they feel that society is geared towards and encouraging extroverted behavior. Our culture is not doing enough to harness the talents and creativity of the introverts. As a result, introverts get into the habit of attempting to mimic extroverts.

Traits of Introverts and Extroverts

Ms. Cain asked attendees where they thought they fall in the introvert-extrovert spectrum. She mentioned that her book includes a test to take to help identify a better understanding of where each person falls on this spectrum. As an example for introverts, she asked the audience to break into groups to discuss a childhood memory. Once everyone laughed uncomfortably, she then revealed that she was kidding. She further explained that introverts are being placed in group settings when they would prefer to be on their own and then return to a group to share their thoughts. It's not that they do not want to be cooperative; they would just rather work independently.

Ms. Cain then asked attendees to think about how they feel after a fun party. Extroverts tend to recharge their batteries in that type of setting whereas introverts wish they were home in their pajamas instead even if it was an amazing time.

The two reactions show different responses to stimulation that are engrained at a very early age. A key trait of introverts is that they react better to fewer interactions and stimuli; extroverts require more stimulation. A variety of research has been conducted to mark the impact of stimuli and indicate that a "one size fits all" environment does not work well for all individuals. This is particularly true for the learning habits and study

environments of students. When students were asked to complete math problems with background noise for example, extroverts performed better with louder background noise while introverts performed best with a softer noise level. An environment that varies stimulation needs to be created where the optimal zone of stimulation can be reached for all different types of individuals.

Ms. Cain referred to an ongoing, decades long longitudinal study led by scientist Jerome Kagan at Harvard on four-month-old infants that allowed his team to predict whether they would be more likely to turn into introverts or extroverts. Exposing the babies to a carefully chosen set of new experiences, they recorded wildly varying reactions to the new stimuli. The 20% of the group that cried and pumped their arms and legs were called “high-reactive,” the 40% who remained quiet and placid moving their arms and legs only occasionally were labeled “low-reactive” and the last 40% fell between the two categories. Kagan predicted that the babies in the high-reactive group were most likely the ones to grow into quiet introverts. Those in the low-reactive group grew into extroverts. Ms. Cain added that both high-reactives (introverts) and low-reactives(extroverts) have traits that are positive and should be nurtured accordingly.

However, she remarked that often society downplays the positive sides of introverts possibly impacting both parents and children. Parents worry that a child who hangs back, remains cautious and fails to participate, may continue his reluctance to engage later in life. However, this type of child is engaging and learning in their own way, paying attention and taking in subtleties especially when involved in a new experience. These traits will serve them well throughout their life. Introverts will spend more time searching out the subtle differences between issues and stay with a problem longer than extroverts will. Such thoroughness is beneficial and should be encouraged.

Ms. Cain shared three famous examples of introverts: Einstein, J.K. Rowling and Warren Buffet. Their work methods were all similar. Each preferred a solitary process approach, staying with the problem carefully before sharing their answers. Three

famous examples of extroverts: Jack Welch, Oprah Winfrey and Sheryl Sandberg. Their pictures presented charisma; big smiles, bubbly qualities and personalities.

Ms. Cain stressed that the world needs both types of personalities understanding and celebrating each other and highlighted famous couples such as Mark and Sharon Zuckerberg, who represent both spectrums and work well together, bringing different perspectives.

Rethinking creativity and excellence

Ms. Cain discussed studies that have emphasized the reward networks in brains. It was discovered that extroverts tend to experience a positive emotional state from the pursuit and attainment of their goals resulting in stronger reward networks. She reviewed the role the amygdala plays with detecting and responding to new, unanticipated or surprising events in the environment. Located deep in the brain, it controls the nervous system and is one of the oldest parts of the brain in terms of evolution. With the help of the highly evolved prefrontal cortex, most people can override their amygdala's responses or tone them down.

The fact that amygdala responses were stronger in high-reactive children years after they were first assessed provides an important indicator about temperament; we can change who we are, but only to a certain degree. Ms. Cain further explained that it is therefore important for each person to learn where his or her own comfort zone lies and to try to stay within it as much as possible. It is equally necessary for teachers and parents alike to determine the best way to teach their children and be cognizant of the differences in high- and low-reactive children. A sink or swim approach will not work with a high-reactive child; instead it would be a traumatic experience rather than a good learning experience. Too little novelty can become boring; yet too much can be overwhelming. Striking a balance will differ from person to person.

While researching for her book Quiet, Ms. Cain visited schools and organizations across the country. She discovered that schools required a lot of group-based work within the

classroom. This may prove to be challenging for introverts. She also mentioned that Philippe Starck, a designer, spends the summer months by himself to express his creativity— no TV, friends, parties or magazines. He believes that to find his unique original self he needs to be absorbed in solitude. Alone time has been the instinct of artists and most creative types for centuries.

Ms. Cain also touched on the concept of brainstorming. Forty years of research show that individuals produce more ideas when alone than amongst a group of people. Dr. Adrian Furnham has noted that businesses must be insane to use brainstorming groups based on scientific evidence. Instead, allowing individuals the time to think deeply and study alone and then report back to the group to refine ideas, produces better results. This is true for both introverts and extroverts. Ms. Cain then shared a few studies that illustrate the human impulse to conform to “group think.” Psychologist Solomon Asch conducted experiments in the 1950s on the power of conformity, validating that individuals will correctly answer a series of questions on their own, but when surrounded by a group offering the same wrong answer they are influenced to conform to and mimic the group opinion. Do individuals believe the wrong answer is correct or are they simply conforming to the group opinion? Brain scanning technology used in more recent studies confirms Asch’s findings, but also revealed activity in areas that suggest that the group manages to actually change an individual’s perception. Peer pressure, it seems, can actually change your point of view.

All of the research on conformity, reward networks and introvert/extrovert reactivity supply us with ideas to better teach our children:

- Balance solo and group work
- Structure group work carefully to ensure that quiet children do not retreat
- Teach “deliberate practice.” Anders Ericsson found that it’s only when alone or one-on-one with a coach that you can engage in deliberate practice and reach exceptional achievement or goals. Other people can be distracting limiting

intense concentration and focus to hone skills. Deliberate practice is the basis of the 10,000 hours rule.

Rethinking leadership

#1: Level 5 Leadership

Ms. Cain then turned the discussion to the key elements that make a good leader and commented on studies conducted by Jim Collins, author of Good to Great. In his research of the best-performing companies, he discovered that many companies were run by what he called “Level 5 Leaders.” This type of leader or CEO was not known for their charisma, but rather for their passion and sense of vision. These leaders were described as quiet, shy, unassuming, soft-spoken and low key by employees. It was the quiet leadership of these CEOs that built and transformed their companies, rather than the leadership of big extroverted individuals with big personalities.

Our children need to know that strong leaders come from being passionate about what you do and acquiring knowledge. Ms. Cain offered Ghandi as a prime example of an introverted leader who did not speak up until he found his passion for the freedom of his people. People can feel when a leader cares about what he or she is doing. It is important for our children to understand that there are many different ways to be a leader. Schools’ and society’s idea of what a leader should be may not accord with the child’s personality type. Children need to find the right leadership balance that suits his or her individual strengths.

#2: Teach public speaking with care

Ms. Cain touched on the subject of ensuring that schools take into consideration introverted temperaments when teaching public speaking. A request made by an 8th grade teacher to improvise in front of the class can have lasting traumatic effects for years. The amygdala encodes fearful experiences and creates avoidance mechanisms to permit the individual to avoid repeating that experience. This makes public speaking very difficult for someone who had a negative encounter with it initially. To overcome

the fear, baby steps need to be taken instead of insisting or requiring that children perform at high anxiety levels. Small, less threatening situations will help build up to public speaking.

#3: Ying-Yang Leadership

Combining an introvert-extrovert pair can create a successful outcome where the two different personalities are able to round each other out.

Rethinking social life

Ms. Cain briefly discussed the aspects of social life for introverts.

#1: Quiet children have a longer runway

Introverted children need more time to take off and fly. It may take longer for a child to acclimate to a new school or social situation. Teachers and parents need to find ways to work around problems or situations. Introducing the child to the school before classes start, enrolling in private lessons or asking the child if there is a friend they would like to get to know outside of class one-on-one; this allows time and security to build up social skills to a bigger group. Listening to our children will help us establish their needs.

#2: One size does not fit all

If a child is reluctant to schedule play dates in the afternoon, it may be that they need to take a break and decompress with some quiet time. If the child is not interested in a large birthday celebration, we need to be able to give them the freedom to celebrate how they wish.

The Quiet Revolution

Ms. Cain shared the importance of helping quiet children find a role model within an extroverted society. Quiet children need to know that someone is there to forge a path. While growing up, her grandfather, a scholarly introvert and Rabbi beloved by his congregation, was her role model and the organization that she has co-founded, Quiet

Revolution, is building on his legacy. She noted that she is currently working on a young adult version of Quiet and will be launching the website www.quietrev.com in early 2015.

The website will include video interviews with well known introverts such as Bill Gates where she will discuss how quiet contributors shape the world offering advice to introverted children on how to use their creativity. There will also be resource guides for parents and teachers. Until the website is fully operational, people may leave their email addresses to stay informed of any new developments.

In addition to working with schools, Ms. Cain is also working with NASA and other companies on tools to effectively utilize and engage all employees to reach their highest potential.

Ms. Cain ended the presentation by asking what we carry around in our suitcase. She questioned whether we are using what is inside that suitcase. Even though our impulse may be to guard its contents carefully, every so often the world needs us to show and share the items inside.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: How do you distinguish the difference between introversion and social anxiety/shyness?

A: Social anxiety or shyness is a fear of social humiliation, judgment or inferiority whereas introversion is a preference for less stimulation. Some overlap may exist.

Q: Are there any resources for introverts to get a point across in an effective way?

A: If an introvert allows time to operate from passion and excitement, the brain activates and impulses to hang back are overridden. To make your voice heard,

preparing things you want to say, pushing yourself to speak up early in a meeting are key factors. If you wait too long to speak up, discomfort and anxiety sets in.

Q: Can you speak about research performed in international or cross-cultural settings?

A: Quiet has been translated into 36 languages and people all over the world have expressed experiencing similar situations as those mentioned in the book. Confucian based cultures are often more supportive of introverts where quiet is regarded as a strength and is respected. However, western extrovert norms are starting to seep through and societies are shifting.

Q: Are introvert/extrovert differences genetic?

A: 50% nurture and 50% nature. Nurture and nature are both involved. Temperament is highly inheritable, but not determinative and the environment does have an impact.

Q: What is the impact of an open plan concept in a house or workplace?

A: Most Americans are working within an open office concept that is inefficient and inhibiting instead of creating an interactive workplace. Workers are unable to focus and are interrupted which in turn creates situations where it takes them longer to complete a task. They also tend to be less social for the fear of being overheard. To vary the amount of stimulation, Ms. Cain has partnered with the office furniture company Steelcase to incorporate quiet spaces within open plan offices.

Q: With the role the amygdala plays in learned fear responses, can the response be reversed?

A: The response may be reversed or suppressed, but it is very difficult and requires a desensitizing process. Exposing yourself to the fear in small, manageable doses requires commitment. The fear can be transformed, but not eradicated.

Q: What is the difference in response to conflict for an introvert?

A: Introverts do not like aggressive forms of conflict.

Q: How do you figure out whether you lean more towards introvert or extrovert behavior and is there such a thing as a hybrid?

A: Ambiverts do exist and it may be easier to view people as on the continuum between introvert and extrovert with very few at an extreme end. Much about understanding each other requires that we incorporate what the other does. Carl Jung discussed the fully realized human incorporating the side that does not come quite as easily. It is important to know what skills we have, what are our needs, how would we spend the day if we could spend it any way we want. We would learn a lot about ourselves.

Q: Can extroverts learn a lot by incorporating introvert aspects and vice-versa?

A: Absolutely. It's important to utilize and be aware of skills that are less natural to you as well as to learn to tame impulses and find an outlet somewhere else.

The evening presentation concluded with a book signing organized by Politics and Prose.

See [event flyer](#).