

**THE
GENIUS
OF
OPPOSITES
OF
GENIUS
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**HOW INTROVERTS AND EXTROVERTS
ACHIEVE EXTRAORDINARY
RESULTS TOGETHER**

JENNIFER B. KAHNWEILER, PHD

*Bestselling Author of *The Introverted Leader* and *Quiet Influence**

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The Genius of Opposites

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*To my daughters, Lindsey and Jessie,
who open my heart*

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Preface

“It comes down to different styles. That is the cause of most conflicts at work. You are an extrovert, Jennifer, and Amy, your assistant, is an introvert. Until you accept that basic fact and learn to work with her, your department won’t get to where it needs to be.”

These words from Peter, an outside company consultant, were hard to hear. I had really worked at moving Amy along and expected her to adopt my energy and pace. None of my efforts were working. Trying to fix Amy and mold her into a “mini-Jennifer” was actually making things worse. Our partnership had already fizzled despite my herculean efforts.

Though it was too late to make things work then, failing to establish a productive work relationship with Amy did motivate me to learn more about introverts and extroverts. This book is the result of my extensive research with many famous and not so famous introvert/extrovert duos over a thirty-year consulting, coaching, and speaking career.

You will discover why it can be so hard to thrive in some of your relationships with opposites. You will learn about five essential steps that successful opposites use to navigate the tricky waters of their relationships. And you

will discover why these five steps are important, how they can break down, and what practical solutions you can use to achieve extraordinary results together.

What's in This Book?

Because I rarely read a book cover to cover myself, I've tried to make the book easy to navigate—and include short summaries and questions for you to consider at the end of each chapter. That way you can dip in and out of chapters that interest you.

We start off in the introduction with the major theme of the book: opposites are most successful when they stop focusing on their differences and use approaches that move them toward results.

In Chapter 1, “Who Are These Unlikely Duos?,” you will learn about the strengths and friction points for introverts and extroverts when they work together. Chapter 2, “How to Mix Oil and Water,” lays out the Genius of Opposites Process, the basis of the book. You will learn how both you and your opposite can “Accept the Alien,” “Bring on the Battles,” “Cast the Character,” “Destroy the Dislike,” and learn why “Each Can't Offer Everything.” There is a quiz to help you assess what you have in common with high-functioning opposites. You can take it and compare your results with your partner's results.

Chapters 3 through 7 are replete with stories of genius opposites in workplaces around the world. You will learn

from their experiences what to do and not to do when handling the dynamic act of working together.

Chapter 8 wraps it all up and helps you jumpstart your plan for success.

So are you ready to hear about:

- The world-famous composers who felt they had much more to offer the world in an already-impressive roster of songs, but they couldn't get over their dislike of each other?
- The automobile CEO who was outmaneuvered by a new CEO in an ill-fated "merger of equals"?
- The remarkably insightful pair of film critics who almost missed their chance to appreciate each other's great gifts because they were so busy competing with each other?
- The skilled consultants who lost their business because they couldn't reconcile their styles and modify their firm when the Great Recession hit?

Given that an estimated approximately 50 percent of people in the world fall on either the introvert or extrovert side of the spectrum, chances are that you have interacted with or will interact with your opposites often. The outcomes of some of your wildly successful and disastrous ventures were determined by whether you were in synch with or at polarity from introverts or extroverts. Perhaps you've left a project because one of the key team members

was an opposite type to you, and the frustration overcame you.

There is no way to assess how many breakthrough ideas never broke through because opposites could not get over the barriers their differences caused. You may have a few in mind from your own career.

It doesn't have to be that way. . . .

Introduction

A Deceptively Easy but Highly Delicate Balancing Act

Introvert and extrovert opposites, working together, can accomplish great things. Think John Lennon and Paul McCartney, Sheryl Sandberg and Mark Zuckerberg, Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, Ralph David Abernathy and Martin Luther King Jr., and Eleanor Roosevelt and Franklin Roosevelt. The list is extensive—likely in your life as well.

Opposites like these attract, right? They often get along very well as work partners and fill in each other's voids. They create beautiful harmonies together.

Yet, there is another pervasive and darker truth. These high-performing duos may have the illusion of being effortlessly well balanced. In reality, complementary opposites can go off the rails very quickly, and the damage can be as negative as the impacts are positive.

There are often temporary and longer deep freezes and estrangements between partners. Advice columnists and twin sisters Ann Landers and Abigail Van Buren didn't speak for seven years. Politicians Teddy Roosevelt and William Howard Taft let politics overtake their friendship. The

Nobel prize–winning scientists James Watson and Francis Crick stopped working together after they discovered DNA. We are familiar with the pain of too many of these work and personal breakups between opposites.

Think of marriage as one example of this phenomenon. For a marriage to succeed, we need to figure out how to deal with each other beyond the initial attraction and honeymoon phases. We know that both partners need to work at it. A happy marriage doesn't just happen.

The truth is that these opposite pairs require constant vigilance, careful maintenance, and balance. Without this focused attention, not only do the partners experience frustration, but their potentially great contributions are not realized. In the workplace, their organizations, clients, and customers all lose out.

So what is the common theme of success?

The key is to remember that these relationships are most successful when opposites stop focusing on their differences and use approaches that move them toward results.

Why Now Is the Time for *The Genius of Opposites*

“You Know Who Is Missing Here?”

For years, I have trained and coached introverts about how to find their leadership voice and make a difference. Every time I lead a seminar, introverts tell me, “You know who is

missing here, Jennifer? My boss, my spouse, my co-worker! They need to hear that nothing is wrong with us and that we have so many strengths to offer. I don't hate extroverts; in fact, I have a child who is one. I do like their outgoing ways, but I am not sure how to get a word in edgewise!"

We often judge each other. Introverts see extroverts as speaking before thinking, using too many words to express themselves, being poor listeners, and appearing self-centered. Introverts know how extroverts get irritated with them because of their slower pace and more measured tones, and are puzzled and frustrated about how to manage the energy and expressive nature of their extroverted work colleagues.

Extroverts turn out to be just as frustrated with introverts. They see introverts as slow to respond, unemotional, and dismissive of their own achievements. They don't understand the introvert's need for quiet time and can be frustrated by a more measured response that requires them to "pull teeth" to get a quick answer.

Extroverts also understand that the outward energy they view as a strength is often too much for their quieter colleagues to handle. They are also clueless about how to dial it down. To them, the introverts' quiet robs the organization of potential ideas and innovations.

Opposites Can Produce Exponential Results

Until now, there has not been a process to blend the complementary talents of introverts and extroverts. But the

remarkable thing is that when you skillfully combine the extrovert set of strengths with those of the introvert, you don't just get addition. You get exponential results.

It's like having one group who can see only close up and one who can see only in the distance. When you bring them together and manage the blend, the entire picture comes into focus and suddenly you can act on things the way neither side could have separately. The possibilities for these two styles collaborating are great for those individuals, but also for their workplaces, including improved morale, surpassed company goals, and the high that comes from satisfying work.

Partnerships Are the New Work Model

The individualistic, self-centered career path is shifting toward one of more collaboration. This new model of work includes former competitors coming together as working partners, sellers collaborating with their customers, and global partners joining across continents to achieve their goals. If these are to blossom, opposites need to understand a key dimension of personality style—introversion and extroversion—and use this knowledge to strengthen themselves and their partnership.

So How Can We Really Make This I/E Thing Work?

Since the publication of my last two books, *The Introverted Leader* and *Quiet Influence*, along with *Quiet* by Susan Cain and other titles, the topic of introversion

has touched a deep recognizable nerve. The rise of the introverts is a real movement. I have heard from hundreds of readers about how they finally feel validated. Large and small organizations are taking introversion more seriously and even recognizing it as an important element of diversity. An increasing demand for training and speaking programs is evidence of this shift, as well as the creation of quiet office spaces to accommodate introverts' needs.

This book is built upon the shoulders of the hundreds of introverts and extroverts who have opened up to me over a ten-year period. Through hundreds of conversations during and after my presentations and in numerous dialogues with my online community, people have asked about how to get along with the “other half.” “How do we as introverts and extroverts achieve great results together?” they ask. How can we really make it work? This groundswell of interest told me now is the time to discover the elements of this delicate balance. It is the next natural step.

Glide Seamlessly in and out of Conversations

The sooner that introverts and extroverts learn about each other's different languages, the quicker they can get to results. We work together in offices, on conference calls, and through text messages. Yet it often feels like we introverts and extroverts are speaking entirely different

languages. We need to learn how to glide more seamlessly in and out of these conversations with as little stress as possible.

Being able to do this not only gets results but is also personally gratifying. Olivia, an extroverted corporate trainer, works closely with introverts. She said of her introverted colleague and friend Henry, “It is not a competition for the spotlight. Henry is my biggest fan. He sees my strengths when I don’t see them.” Henry said, “Olivia has her antenna up and is cued into others’ needs. We pass the baton to each other and don’t care who has the fun part.”

What My Research Discovered About Opposites

To understand and eventually surface the necessary protons and electrons of the Genius of Opposites model, I interviewed more than forty introvert and extrovert partners. The interviewees represent different career fields, genders, ages, nationalities, and organizations. I first gave them a set of questions about the dynamics of working with their opposite, and they opened up to me about their learnings and the highs and lows of navigating a relationship with their opposite.

The Genius of Opposites Has a Five-Step ABCDE Process

In this latest research, I culled their key lessons and themes and boiled down their secret sauce into five key

steps. I then placed these steps into an easy to remember five-step ABCDE process. You will read about how the Genius of Opposites Process works and even be able to take a quiz to determine how close you are to achieving “genius status.”

As you read this book and hear the stories of others, I hope you will discover the power of working with a current opposite and the many other opposites you interact with regularly at work. I anticipate that you will awaken your own genius by using the five steps that have launched other pairs into the sheer enjoyment of creating together something they could not have produced alone.

Who Is This Book For?

This book is for introverts and extroverts working in organizations across the globe who who are in partnerships within and outside their diverse organizations. These are not limited to internal partnerships, but also include those with outside customers, suppliers, and strategic partners. In addition, coaches, trainers, and managers who want to bring out the best in their employees will benefit from the ideas and solutions presented here.

So here is a sneak preview of the process.

The Genius of Opposites Process

Each of these steps is an essential component of a strong partnership.



1. **Accept the Alien:** You can't change your opposite, but you can understand them. Once you are able to accept this fact, you are in for much less stress.
2. **Bring on the Battles:** See disagreement as necessary to arriving at better outcomes because you challenge each other to come up with better solutions together than you would alone.
3. **Cast the Character:** Know each person's role in a scenario and cast them so that you bring out

your opposite's best. Opposites share the credit no matter what role they take.

4. **Destroy the Dislike:** When you respect each other and act like friends, you can talk openly and have fun.
5. **Each Can't Offer Everything:** Know that each one of you is incapable of offering everything, so for true diversity, you work in concert to provide the widest range of options to others.

Figure I.1 The ABCs of The Genius of Opposites Process

Accept the Alien

Bring on the Battles

Cast the Character

Destroy the Dislike

Each Can't Offer Everything

Summary: Preventing the Crash and Burn

The benefits such relationships bring are self-evident, but there's also a price to pay when they are not properly maintained. For every success story about two opposites who made it work, there are four or five about opposites who crashed and burned because they couldn't reconcile their different styles.

If you and your opposite are already thriving, this book is your maintenance manual, your key to avoiding the crash and burn. If you're just embarking on an

opposites relationship, this book can stop you both from going terribly and off track. Then it will become your maintenance manual. Proceed with respect and caution: genius opposites do not just “happen.”

Part I

The Basics

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Chapter 1

Who Are These Unlikely Duos?

*One going up, one coming down
But we seem to land on common ground
When things go wrong we make corrections
To keep things moving in the right direction
Try to fight it but I'm telling you, Jack,
It's useless, opposites attract.*

—Oliver Leiber, Songwriter for Paula Abdul¹

What Are Genius Opposites?

Genius opposites are partnerships made up of introverts and extroverts in all types of combinations. These include executives and admins, creatives and their collaborators, sales people and office support personnel, project managers and their sponsors, and more.

These powerful teams have a unique chemistry and achieve outcomes they never could achieve alone. But they take work to succeed, and the magic rises from their differences. Although their styles are divergent, the results of their collaboration look like they came from a single mind. *Their relationships are most successful when they stop focusing on their differences and use approaches that move them toward results.*

Be Sure You're Defining Introverts and Extroverts Accurately

Introverts get their energy from within, and extroverts get theirs from the outside world. Though many of us claim to fall somewhere in the middle on this energy scale, we do tend to lean one way or another.

You can also behave more extroverted or introverted in a specific situation. For example, as an extrovert, you may be very comfortable at large holiday parties with strangers, but you may clam up with the finance team, with whom you have less confidence. Or as an introvert, you may speak powerfully in a prepared talk but be tongue-tied with your co-workers at lunch.

The deal-breaker question of whether you are more of an introvert or extrovert is this: Do you need time to recharge after being with people? If the answer is a resounding yes!, then there is a good chance you are an introvert. But if it is just a medium yes, then you are likely more extroverted. While that distinction may not be especially scientific, it is practical.

Beth Buelow is an expert on introverted entrepreneurs and author of *The Introvert Entrepreneur*.² In complimenting an introvert/extrovert pair who made their business work as opposites, Beth said, “You are mastering being together together.”³ That mastery describes many of the partners you will meet in this book. In different ways, they are seeking to deliver results together. You

will also read about the breakdowns that occur along the way between introverts and extroverts, and how to avoid them. Here are a few of the problems that can occur as a result of introvert/extrovert differences. Can you identify with any of these in either your work or personal life?

Opposite Wiring Causes Misfiring

The people who drive us crazy often view the world through different lenses. In fact, those “lens” differences or traits that we at first find endearing often become the ones we can’t stand. I loved my introverted husband Bill’s quiet, calm demeanor when we were dating. A year later, I found those long pauses irritating. *Why doesn’t he answer when I ask a question?* I thought. The truth was that Bill was responding in the same slow cadence as before, but the honeymoon was over and I was less accepting. He still expresses himself that way more than forty years later. Fortunately, learning about introvert/extrovert preferences helped me to reframe his long pauses and accept his need to think first before he spoke.

In addition to differences in pace of speech, these natural differences can also lead to conflict between introverts and extroverts.

Wiring Challenge #1: Being Alone Versus with People

Introverts need and want to spend time alone. They prefer quiet, private spaces and like to handle projects individually, one on one, or in small groups. Extroverts have

a hard time understanding that and often feel the need to intrude on that solitude. My husband Bill, in his humorous way, has a large “Do Not Disturb” sign on his door, as a fifteen-year-old boy might! Extroverts need a strong signal like that to know introverts mean business when they say they need alone time.

Writer Jonathan Rauch explains, “Extroverts . . . assume that company, especially their own, is always welcome. . . . As often as I have tried to explain the matter to extroverts, I have never sensed that any of them really understood. They listen for a moment and then go back to barking and yipping.”⁴

Extroverts thrive on being out among people, love meeting new ones and packing a lot into a day. The more activities the better it is. When extrovert Steve Cohn, a director of learning, is on the road, he likes to eat with his colleagues, to “hear sixteen conversations going on at the same time.” An introverted team member told him that at the end of the day, she had given everything she had while in the classroom and needed to recharge. She headed up to her room and that was it for the evening. Cohn was irritated at first, but changed his thinking when he thought about it. He explained, “I teach this stuff (communication skills), so I am understanding.”

Until partners understand these differences, they may not be as understanding and resent team members who don't join in evening socializing. Being alone

or being with people can create challenges in customer interactions as well. Introverts are challenged when they are thrust into gatherings designed for networking with strangers. Extroverts are frustrated when a customer or client squelches their rapport-building time by being uncommunicative or wanting to get to business.

Wiring Challenge #2: Thinking It Through Versus Talking It Out

Introverts need space and time to process their thoughts. Even in casual conversations, they consider others' comments carefully. They stop and reflect before responding and know how to use the power of the pause to let everyone's words sink in. Extroverts are impatient while waiting for introverts to finish their thoughts. They also express frustration about having to ask questions in order to pull ideas from their introverted counterparts, especially when decisions must be made. They often are ready to move while their introvert partners are still pondering the options.

Extroverts may not have fully formed their ideas, but are forming them aloud as they speak. Introverts find this tiring and become confused trying to follow an extrovert's running commentary. They may even think that the extrovert has changed his mind when he is expressing a new thought; actually, the thought was just percolating aloud. Consultant and author Emily Axelrod illustrates

the point: “It used to frustrate Dick (her husband and business partner) when I would think out loud. Once, I ran to him and said, ‘Let’s go to the movies. We can see this, this, this, or this!’ He just looked at me. Suddenly, it dawned on me: it frustrated him when I would talk about all these things that we could do because he thought we had to do them all!”

Wiring Challenge #3: Being Private Versus Being an Open Book

Introverts keep personal matters under wraps, sharing information with only a select few. Even then, they share it only after they know people well and feel a high level of comfort with them. Extroverts want to connect and warm up to people more quickly. They may perceive introverts as standoffish, aloof, and downright angry when first meeting them, especially when introverts don’t quickly self-disclose. Introverts, on the other hand, find the questions and immediate best-friend camaraderie intrusive.

That extroverts need to talk, talk, and talk to everyone often baffles the introvert. Author and leadership consultant Devora Zack tells introverts in her classes that extroverts say, “I can talk to anyone about anything.” She has watched those same introverts “stare with mouths dropped open, as if upon their first viewing of a UFO.”⁵

Summary: Figure Out the Wiring

The new model of work requires that we collaborate and understand how extroverts and introverts are wired differently. Not understanding how these different wires can cross can cause serious damage in being productive, satisfied, and ultimately in serving your customers.

Your natural disposition toward or away from solitude, your preference for thinking or talking aloud and being private or an open book are all potential causes for disagreement. Though their styles are divergent and these unlikely duos take work to succeed, the magic rises from their differences. The results of their collaboration look like they came from a single mind.

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