



Pippa's Guide to Working for an Introvert

Have you ever taken the Myers-Briggs test? It's very popular in the business sector and is a test designed to indicate what an individual's psychological preferences are. If you take it, (there are lots of free versions online) depending on what you answer to a string of questions, you will be assigned one of sixteen different personality types. It's quite interesting to do and far more enlightening, revealing and useful than doing one of those cheesy multiple choice personality tests in a magazine or on Facebook, which I'll admit to being partial to doing from time to time. As a result I leapt at the chance to give the Myers-Briggs test a go. The description of the personality I was allotted is me in a nutshell and the difference between silly magazine quizzes and this is that the former certainly wouldn't be taken seriously by an employer whereas this would.

Taking the test also makes you realise and think about how different we all are. Everyone has their own unique way of thinking, of being and of operating and for a PA, particularly one who's temping and/or on short contracts it's essential to understand this as early on in your career as possible.

You see, one of the most interesting things about being a career PA is that although the job might be similar wherever you go, the person you work for never is. Personally I see this as a huge positive. Working with and for different types of people forces you to be pragmatic, teaches you a lot about tact and diplomacy and ultimately fine tunes your ability to be able to adapt and indeed your social capabilities. This is all incredibly important, and of course whenever starting a new PA job you'll need to be able to suss out how your boss likes to do things reasonably quickly in order to impress.

The majority of bosses I worked for when first starting out were fairly outgoing, dynamic and fantastic communicators, extroverts if you like, but there was one I shall never forget because he was most certainly someone you would describe as an introvert.

He had a habit of speaking incredibly quietly, to the point where I often had to say pardon. He avoided ever socialising with his team and at the end of the contract I realised I knew nothing about his personal life whatsoever. At the time this threw me a bit and working for him meant changing my ways so I thought today I'd share some thoughts and tips on what to do if life throws you an introverted boss.

Change Your Expectations

Your boss got the job for a reason and not being loud or particularly communicative doesn't mean they won't be entirely effective at what they do. Perhaps you're used to getting lots of direction and feedback from your leader? Perhaps you feel a bit lost without it and/or unappreciated, yet with an introvert boss you simply might not get lots of reassurance, in which case you'll need to learn to cope without.

You'll also need to accept that they may only want to say things once and prefer not have much in-depth discussion about anything. In short, when working for an introvert it's important to be confident enough that you can just get on with things and know that if they're not saying anything then all is well. Start viewing a lack of response or feedback as a positive. Introverts will probably prefer to only address things when they need to do so, so if nothing's being said it's because you're doing a great job, they're happy and everything's under control.

Hone your Listening Skills

If your boss is a fairly quiet person they probably don't want a PA who likes to sing at their desk, have music blasting from their computer and permanently be nattering to all and sundry. You may need to take your own talking down a notch and have your personal interactions with colleagues when he or she isn't about. Also, make sure you listen really well when they are giving instructions. In my experience an introvert doesn't relish having to repeat themselves. They like to keep talking to a minimum so will really appreciate it if you have listened properly the first time. They also don't tend to enjoy a running commentary on what you're doing or being asked thousands of questions so pick wisely!

Consider your differences in order to understand them

There isn't anything wrong with being an introvert just as there also isn't anything wrong with being an extrovert and of course there are so many shades of different personalities in between the extremes. What's important is to respect one another's differences but also to ultimately find a way of working which suits you both and that makes both of you happy within the workplace.

That said, some people feel energised and most effective when working quietly and methodically on their own. Others feed off social interaction and need it in fact to be at their most effective. Introverts tend to analyse problems internally and to strategize most effectively on their own, extroverts are the opposite. Extroverts love working collaboratively on problems and tend to analyse things externally.

As long as you can respect that there are different ways of doing things then it should be fine. You'll be able to work independently but together whilst understanding that there's more than one way to skin a cat.

Be a Leader

One huge advantage of working for an introvert is that they will probably leave you to get on with things on your own a lot. In turn, this means the opportunity to be more in charge and taking responsibility for things a more extroverted boss might not allow. Having an introvert for a boss means you'll be able to take more of your own initiative and probably be left to make more decisions than you would if working for an extrovert. This can be a great thing when it comes to your own progression, confidence and experience.

Respect your boss and adapt accordingly

If it is achingly clear that you are working for an introvert, small changes to your approach could make a huge difference. For example whereas an extroverted boss might encourage a 'bang on my door anytime' kind of culture, with an introvert it's probably better to ask for one on one meetings in advance. This ensures your boss won't be over stimulated and that they can give you their full attention. It also means they can prepare for the communications and proves that you are respectful of their time and space. Introverts probably prefer communicating by email so leave phone calls as a last resort. If you send a text or an email, it means they can ponder what you've written, refer to it for accuracy and you won't have interrupted their train of thought in the same way that a phone call or face to face exchange does.

So there you have it, my tips on working for an introvert. Hope they help and best of British!
Pippa xx