

CHARACTER VS PERSONALITY

Believe it or not, I'm an introvert. As someone who spends so much time with boards of directors and also making public speeches, I find it's the quiet time of reflection and writing this *Newsletter Directors' Compass* that reenergizes me. While I enjoy spending time getting to know and interacting with directors and managements, it is the alone time where I often do my best work. Always curious and always looking to improve, I've read some recent books on the traits of introverts and extroverts. One book that I really liked is by Susan Cain entitled, *Quiet: the Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, Broadway Books, New York 2013. Maybe I like the use of the word "quiet" since there is always so much noise going on, and often it is difficult to hear yourself think.

Believe it or not, there are many introverts in this world, and some of the most famous (Abraham Lincoln, Eleanor Roosevelt, Warren Buffett, and Gandhi to name only a few) have made a difference in this world and possess a voice that needs to be heard. At the same time, we have many extroverts who have made significant contributions and like to bang their own drums. This is not a bad thing unless it quiets the voice of those around them -- some of whom are introverts. Depending upon which scientific study you consult, one third to one half of all Americans are introverts.

There are many definitions for introverts and extroverts, and possibly the best starting basis is the 1921 definition by Carl Jung that was set forth in his book, *Psychological Types*, which popularized the terms introvert and extrovert as the central building blocks of personality. "Introverts are drawn to the inter-world of thought and

feelings. Extroverts to the external life of people and activities. Introverts focus on the meaning they make of the event swirling around them; extroverts plunge into the events themselves. Introverts recharge their batteries by being alone; extroverts need to recharge when they don't socialize enough."

To go on, introverts feel just right with less stimulation, as when they sip wine with a close friend, solve a crossword puzzle, or read a book. Extroverts enjoy the extra bang that comes from activities like meeting new people, skiing slippery slopes, and cranking up the stereo. Introverts and extroverts work differently. Introverts often work more slowly and deliberately, and they like to focus on one task at a time and can have mighty powers of concentration -- they are relatively immune to the lures of wealth and fame. Extroverts tend to tackle assignments quickly, and they make fast (sometimes rash) decisions and are comfortable multi-tasking and risk taking. They enjoy the thrill of the chase for rewards like money and status.

It is interesting to reflect on where you fit on the personality spectrum, and we encourage all to think of where you may fit in and where others may as well. Knowing yourself and also others allows for an understanding of where things fit. I encourage all to read Cain's book, and there are some tests within the book that will help you determine where you fit on the spectrum.

A major theme of Cain's book deals with the concept of character vs. personality, and how over the past few centuries we have moved from a culture of character (introversion) to a culture of personality (extroversion). Cain points

out that America has shifted from what cultural historian Warren Susman called a culture of character to a culture of personality, and by doing so have opened up a Pandora's Box of personal anxieties from which we may never quite recover.

In the culture of character, the ideal self was serious, disciplined, and honorable. What counted was not so much the impression one made in public, as much as how one behaved in private. The word personality did not exist in English until the 18th Century, and the idea of having a good personality was not wide-spread until the 20th Century. At such time began the embrace of the culture of personality, where Americans started to focus on how others perceived them. We became captivated by people who were bold and entertaining, and the social role demanded of all. In the new culture, personality was that of a performer. Every American was to become a performing self. To get ahead, the individual became the focus.

We also saw change from the standpoint of working with people. Americans found themselves working no longer with neighbors but with strangers. Citizens morphed into employees facing the question of how to make a good impression on people with whom they had no civic or family ties. The reason why one man gained a promotion, or one woman suffered a social snub had become less explicable on grounds of long-standing favoritism or old family feuds. Cain goes on to emphasize that one of the greatest pushes of the transformation from character to personality was the self-help tradition in which Dale Carnegie played such a prominent role. Dale Carnegie's courses focused on how to become popular and be an effective speaker. With

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those traits, one could be accepted and be successful. This is a recurring theme in self-help books, which have always lived large in the American psyche.

Many of the earliest conduct guides (including the Bible and other religious works) were focused on restraint. The advice manuals of the 19th Century were less religious but still preached the value of noble character. They featured case studies of historical heroes like Abraham Lincoln, revered not only as a gifted communicator, but also as a modest man who did not, as Ralph Waldo Emerson put it, push superiority. But, by 1920, popular self-help guides had changed their focus from introverts to outer charm, to know what to say and how to say it, to create a personality is power, and try in every way to have a ready command of the manners in which make people think he's a mighty likeable fellow.

The earlier guides had focused on character and working on improving the following qualities: citizenship, duty, work, golden deeds, honor, reputation, morals, manners, and integrity. But the new personality celebrated the following qualities: magnetic, fascinating, stunning, attractive, glowing, dominate, forceful, and energetic. As someone who reads the two lists above and thinks about how that fits within community banking (primarily vision, mission and values), the character qualities mean more to me but, I also understand how the personality qualities can have an important role. In looking at our country and the industry, it is obvious that we have moved much more toward a culture of personality as being the norm. But is that right? Are we out of bal-

ance? Does that make sense for the long term? What do our partners demand?

The Cain book focuses on the importance of balancing the two, and that introverts and extroverts can often work well together, with each having different roles and responsibilities. In fact, some of the most successful banks are run by introverts who have an extroverted middle management. There is a balance here, and it is critical that the voices of both are heard. We have often found that the most gregarious type leaders that emphasize personality as compared to character sometimes don't make the best decisions. There are a few chapters of Cain's book that discuss the need of introverts to find their voice, and, also, for the extroverts to really listen.

My father always used the term "all sizzle and no steak" to refer to a few bankers who could talk a good game but could not deliver. I now wonder whether "sizzle and steak" could be used to show the dependence of character and personality to one another. If there is "sizzle" and no "steak", not a good thing since there is no substance. But if there is "steak" and no "sizzle," you only get a cold piece of meat -- also not a good thing. Maybe the point here is a little of both and not too much of one. Financial institutions should be a balance of both cultures.

While my father was more of an extrovert, he also knew the importance of character, what he referred to as loyalty, courage, and honor. Unfortunately, we now live in an environment (political and media) that seems to reward personalities that don't have a lot to say but who can say it the loudest and are the most magnetic.

However, sometimes the softest voice provides the greatest wisdom. We have to recognize that substance does matter but, also, so does personality. Maybe that should be the focus as we look at the blending the two cultures of character and personality to make for an exceptional bank. Where do you fit in? Where does your management fit in? An interesting thought as you set the direction for the years ahead. If you only have personality and no character -- not certain you will be around for long. Same is true with all character and no personality: how do you please your partners?

Understanding the various type of people that make up your bank and having the right blend is how you maximize performance and success. As an introvert who often finds a voice, I see the continued need for a little of both.

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