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## **The Introvert's Guide to Thriving in a Collaborative Workplace**

By Calie Wrona

In fifth grade, I won the “Most Talkative” superlative. By “won,” I mean my teacher—perhaps teetering on the edge of a breakdown from listening to me passionately dissect *The Series of Unfortunate Events* for the thousandth time—easily handed me the title.

And honestly? It was accurate. I talked a lot. But then something happened. Somewhere between childhood and adulthood, between classrooms and conference rooms, between laughing with friends and sitting stiffly in an office chair, I became quiet.

Not with people I knew. With them, I was still the person who could tell a story for too long and get too animated about something as simple as a good sandwich. But in formal settings? I started choosing when to speak, and measuring my words like they were precious and finite.

And maybe that's you, too. You're loud where you're comfortable, but when the workplace demands group brainstorming, open floor plans, and constant interaction, you shrink a little. Maybe you've thought, *am I supposed to change? Am I supposed to be louder?*

No. Absolutely not. You don't need to become someone else to thrive in a collaborative workplace. You need a strategy.

### **Step One: Speak Early, Speak Boldly**

Meetings are like trying to jump into a fast-moving game of Double Dutch—you can either find your rhythm early or spend the whole time awkwardly bobbing on the sidelines. If you wait too long, the conversation moves on without you, and suddenly, that brilliant point you wanted to make feels out of place or irrelevant.

So here's the trick: speak early. Even if it's something small, even if it's just adding to someone else's point, get your voice in the room as soon as possible. That way, you don't spend the whole meeting overthinking, waiting for the "perfect" time to talk (spoiler alert: it never comes).

### **Step Two: Find Your Power Move**

Every workplace has secret shortcuts—the kind that lets you stay engaged without draining your energy. The trick is finding your power move.

Maybe you're the one who sends the meeting recap (because, let's be real, half the room was zoned out anyway). Or you quietly take the reins on the team's project tracker, shaping the workflow without getting caught in the back-and-forth. Or maybe you become the go-to person for sharp, thoughtful feedback—the one whose insights move the needle.

Whatever it is, lean into it. Influence isn't just about volume. It's about knowing how to play the game on your terms.

### **Step Three: Recharge Like Your Job Depends on It (Because It Does)**

Collaboration is great. So is disappearing for strategic periods to stare at a wall in blessed silence.

If you need to step away, step away. Guard your energy like it's your most valuable currency—because it is. Block off time on your calendar. Put your headphones in, even if you're not listening to anything. Take a walk and let yourself be the main character in an indie film, contemplating life while sipping an overpriced iced coffee.

The world will take as much of your energy as you let it. Protect it like your best ideas depend on it—because they do.

### **Step Four: Throw Out Imperfect Ideas**

Somewhere along the way, we were taught that if you don't have something brilliant to say, you shouldn't say anything at all. But the reality? The best ideas are built, not born.

If you wait until your thoughts are perfectly polished before sharing them, you'll spend your whole career in silence. So throw things out there. Be okay with imperfection. Let

people build on what you say. Because in the end, collaboration isn't about being the smartest person in the room. It's about making the whole room smarter.

### **The Quiet Advantage**

Introverts bring something to the table that gets overlooked in the noise—thoughtfulness, observation, depth. You might not be the first to speak, but when you do, you bring clarity. You might not love group brainstorming, but you refine ideas in a way that makes them stronger. You might not be the loudest, but you're often the most deliberate.

Success in a collaborative workplace isn't about forcing yourself into an extrovert's mold. It's about owning your strengths, playing to them, and making space for your voice—on your terms.