

## **Shyness can stymie career**

### **Introverts can become extroverts at the office with just a little work**

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Ever get the impression the workplace is designed for extroverts? That shy people need not apply? That far from inheriting the Earth, the meek are destined to labour in obscurity, never getting the credit they deserve?

This story is for all you shy people. You know who you are. You cringe inwardly at the thought of interacting with others, shake when asked to speak at a meeting.

The message you'll read is that you must strive to overcome your shyness or it will stymie your career advancement.

"Shy people often don't want to approach people for fear of being rebuffed," says Lynda Goldman a business etiquette consultant with Montreal based. Goldman-Smythe. "We're born with a psychology that makes some of us innately shy. But shy or not, in business, you have to connect with people. Success depends on your ability to network and communicate."

Elaine Creighton agrees. An executive coach and communications expert with La Communications Dynamique, Creighton believes the workplace favors people who "demonstrate they can get things done."

"When shy people stay in the background, they get overlooked," she says. "They think their work speaks for them. I say you have to speak for your work. Otherwise, your career can lag."

Goldman and Creighton were once shy but both have worked to overcome their shyness. Here's what they advise.

"Small steps," Goldman says. "Shyness is lack of confidence and you don't have to become a new person immediately so set small goals for yourself."

For instance if you're at a business event, try talking to someone about why she's at the event. "The event itself is a common bond," Goldman says. Resolve that you will speak to two people at the event for five minutes each. "As you have some success meeting other people, you'll get over some of your shyness."

Goldman says self-consciousness keeps shy people shy. "They think everyone is looking at them or judging them," she says. "In fact, most people are primarily interested in themselves. So showing an interest in others will take the pressure off you."

If you must attend an event in which participants are expected to stand and introduce themselves, prepare in advance. “Explain what you do, where you come from and say something interesting about yourself,” Goldman says. “Don’t just state your name and profession and stand there.”

She says her own effort to become more outgoing started with the reading of Susan RoAne’s book *How to Work a Room* (Harper Collins). “It was a pivotal book for me,” Goldman says. “It taught me to ask open ended questions. For instance, instead of asking ‘do you like skiing,’ a better question is ‘what do you like to do in your spare time.’ It stimulates conversation.”

Elaine Creighton decided to do something about her shyness when she realized the workplace required her to be more gregarious. “Gone are the days when you could work quietly and get a pat on the head,” she says. “I decided I didn’t want to be shy any more and started talking to everyone, including strangers in public places. It took me about two years to stop being shy.”

A former teacher, Creighton coaches people on marketing themselves. Her advice for shy but ambitious people is to make sure our employer know what you can do. “Shy people get overlooked for projects that they could be good at,” she says. “But being shy often means you’re a good listener. So you listen for what’s happening at work and get valuable information. You may find out your department is publishing a brochure. You know you’re a good graphics person but you’re shy so your employer doesn’t know. You could volunteer to work on the project. If someone doesn’t know you can do graphic design, you have to tell the right people.”

Creighton’s other suggestions included:

- ❖ Stand up tall.
- ❖ Speak firmly, particularly at meetings and don’t apologize for your ideas.
- ❖ Make forthright statements such as: “I’m able to put together a brochure in a week.”
- ❖ Tape record yourself speaking until you sound like you mean it.
- ❖ Pretend you’re someone you admire and speak like that person.
- ❖ When in a group, think of a topic you’re passionate about and discuss it.
- ❖ Smile while you speak.
- ❖ Be the ice-breaker the first person to say “good morning” when you arrive at work.
- ❖ Ask others about themselves and respond to what they say.
- ❖ Volunteer to be on a committee related to something you love to do. It’ll build your confidence.

Gilles Gaillano considers himself a “formerly shy person”. Casting off his shy persona has been an evolutionary process that began in 1988 when he and his wife launched a car-rental franchise. They later moved to Mexico, where they ran a restaurant for five years. Today, Gaillano runs two Quebec companies, including a vehicle wholesaler and one that sells membranes for swimming pools, roofs and industrial floors. “If you have a hard

time selling yourself because you're shy, you have a hard time in business," he says. "When I got into the restaurant business, I was trying to please people. We had multi-millionaires and ordinary people eating in our establishment and I treated the business as if it were my home and people were coming over to eat. I started to feel comfortable welcoming people."

One of things that has helped is his membership in Business Network International, a networking group that has taught him how to market himself. "I no longer shy away from social contact," he says. "I go looking for it and make a lot of cold calls."

He also coaches his son's hockey team. "Often, when I get in front of a group of adults, I picture them as if they were the 5 year old kids I coach. I visualize a scene that is not intimidating."

And it works. No more Mr. Shy Guy.