

How Introverted Entrepreneurs Can Master Public Speaking and Networking

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Guest Post by Nahamani Yisrael

Successful entrepreneurs come from all walks of life and in all shapes and colors. Even amid individuals from the same ethnic or socioeconomic group, there is a wide variety in how group members process thought. This form of diversity among business owners adds a unique layer to the business environment. The way in which these individuals see the world around them allows each to solve various societal problems through their product and service offerings in their own one-of-a-kind way.

Regardless of the industry in which these individuals operate, as leaders of their respective organizations entrepreneurs are often tasked with introducing their brand to new audiences. Quite often this is done through networking and public speaking engagements. Speaking on behalf of one's company, especially in front of large crowds, can be intimidating to anyone, however introverted entrepreneurs often find these task particularly daunting.

Recently I had the opportunity to attend a networking event where Angela Jenkins, Vice President of Human Resources of YWCA of Cincinnati, sat on a panel of African American career women. Jenkins spoke to a group of hundreds of women leaders, entrepreneurs, and aspiring career women. She was poised and succinct and delivered encouraging words with what seemed like great ease. After the event I approached her to commend her on her powerful delivery which conveyed her passion for the subject matter at hand. Through our brief conversation I learned that she considered herself to be an introvert, I was shocked yet intrigued.

As I began working on this article, I was reminded of our brief encounter. I reached out to Jenkins to learn more about her tactics for overcoming her natural sense of apprehension in order to deliver a powerful message to her captivated audience. She agreed to allow me to interview her for this article, and we met for brunch near her Downtown Cincinnati office.

During our face-to-face interview, Angela Jenkins advised me of how she was thrust into a leadership role at U.S. Shoe when her supervisor became unexpectedly ill. With little time to prepare, she took on the responsibilities that the role presented, including facilitating trainings for new hires. As her organization grew, through the acquisition of Lens Crafters, a then young company with an intense growth trajectory, Jenkins's speaking responsibilities also increased dramatically.

Jenkins attributes her success during this period to a strong mentor who continuously encouraged her to pursue personal development and pushed her to achieve her goals. "Because of my natural introverted tendencies I don't typically seek out leadership opportunities, but given the circumstances I was the best person for the job," says Jenkins.

Introversion itself is a cognitive behavior that causes the individual to reflect inwardly. One's inward reflection may erroneously be deemed as shyness or quietness; however, shyness and quietness are both social phenomena, not cognitive at all.

In an effort to gain a better understanding of how introversion affects leaders, I reached out to one of my former college professors, Julian Mendoza. Mendoza is an innovation and venture consultant. He is also a member of the Adjunct Faculty at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio where he often teaches leadership courses to students at The Williams College of Business.

"Many people misinterpret introvert behavior as social cues. A thoughtful pause is just that: a pause to think. The introvert brain wants to take in as much input as possible. That takes time, as does the processing."

Mendoza further explains the template-driven nature of introverted individuals. "Additionally, if the person is "pattern-oriented", s/he would seem startled (like a deer in the headlights) if the new inputs are very strange to the pattern models that were carefully developed and now kept on the shelf as ready templates."

While the nature of introverted individuals may seem slower to respond than extroverts, the careful, deliberate response in many cases may be superior to someone who just blurts out the first thing that comes to mind.

Sitting across the table from Jenkins at our brunch, I could see that she was taking in every aspect of the room around us. She sat facing the doors where she could input each new arrival into her mental template of the room. The words she used to answer my probing questions were very deliberate and well thought out. I could tell that she wanted me to succeed in creating an impactful article that would help shed light on how introverted leaders could capitalize on their uniqueness and excel at public speaking and networking. I took this opportunity to ask her for some specific tips that I could share with readers. Her answers came very easily to her, as if she had been waiting for me to ask this exact question.

"Always practice and prepare!" she said almost immediately. "When preparing for a speaking engagement, I do a lot of reading. I always write out notes, well basically bullet points, to remind me of what I want to say." Thinking back to that March morning when I first encountered Jenkins, I couldn't remember seeing any look at any notecards or pause to review any bullet points.

"Do you actually use them during your speech?" I asked for clarification.

"No, not really, I just feel more comfortable knowing that I have them," she answered.

Jenkins paused, giving me time to jot down my notes before she delivered her second tip. "Find someone who is stronger than you and allow them to coach you." For a moment I thought she was speaking to me personally, but soon remembered how she had praised her mentor at Lens Crafters. According to Jenkins, this individual always set the stage for her to excel, providing her with all of the resources she would need for constant improvement.

The part of Jenkins's statement that stood out to me was being coachable — taking feedback with grace and applying said feedback to future endeavors. Jenkins, by being coachable, was able to learn from every speaking engagement. Though she may have been nervous at first, at the end of her speeches she typically ended with an "OMG moment", from which she drew the courage to do it yet again.

Most introverted individuals know that they are unique. This uniqueness gives them qualities that add value to their respective organizations. Jenkins hopes that more introverts will be given opportunities to step outside of their comfort zones and share their message with the world. With a lot of preparation and a bit of encouragement, introverted entrepreneurs can effectively deliver their message to both large and small groups of individuals, who could potentially be their next big client, referral source, or brand ambassador.





Here are a few tips that can help you excel at your next big networking event:

- **Prepare an elevator pitch** – Practicing your elevator pitch in a safe environment is the best way to increase your confidence and help you work out any kinks in your spiel. Try having someone record you as you give your pitch. Not only can you go back and review it, but you can also post the final version on your social media profile and let your friends and followers know about your business.
- **Arrive early** – Try arriving a few minutes before the event starts. This gives you additional time to get over your natural jitters and allows you to meet new arrivals one by one versus entering a crowded room of unfamiliar faces.
- **Take along a companion** – The goal of networking is to meet new people and introduce them to your business and/or brand. You may feel more comfortable knowing that there is someone in the room with whom you are familiar. However, make sure that you step away from time to time to give yourself an opportunity to mingle.
- **Stake out your safe space** – Find a quiet corner to which you can retreat should you begin to feel overwhelmed. One tactic is to leave a book or briefcase in your safe space so that others can see that you have claimed this space for your own. In the event that there aren't any such spaces that you can use for this purpose, there is always the option to go to the restroom or step outside to catch your breath.
- **Recharge your batteries after the event** – Be sure to schedule downtime after each big event to allow yourself time to recharge. Resist the urge to stack appointments as this does not permit you the necessary self-care time that introverts often require.

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