

Two Ears, One Mouth



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Last week's eNews on "Soft Power and Quiet Persistence" drew a small army of introverts out of the shadows of our large and growing list of subscribers. Thanks so much for your feedback and examples of "soft power" in the leadership ranks of the nonprofit sector.

Although it was a bit harder than usual to find time to read for work or pleasure this week, I was able to finish Chapter 10, "The Communication Gap," in Susan Cain's book, [Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking](#). The topic of "communication" frequently arises in our risk management consulting practice. The failure to effectively connect risk management to mission advancement with an intentional communications strategy can lead to the demise of an otherwise promising risk management plan. But effective risk communication isn't limited to a clearly worded statement of policy or gently-paced safety briefing with attractive visual aids. Engaging diverse points of view in risk identification and treatment requires both sales and coaching skills.

In Chapter 10 Cain reminds her readers of the expression "we have two ears and one mouth and we should use them proportionately." She shares the advice of sales guru Jon Berghoff who admonishes his clients to ditch their preconceived notions of selling in favor of learning to "really listen well" to prospective customers. Berghoff attributes his success as an introvert salesman extraordinaire to being a very good listener.

Listening intently is fundamental to cultivating a risk aware culture in your nonprofit. And research cited by Cain suggests that introvert-extrovert pairings can lead to more relaxed, open conversations. If talking about risk makes some members of your team uneasy, try experimenting with two-person conversation teams, rather than a typical large group brainstorming activity.

And consider adapting a page from Jon Berghoff's playbook for sales success: focus on understanding risk in your nonprofit's context BEFORE you rush to "solve," mitigate or work around risk.

The more I learn about my introverted colleagues, the more I become convinced that we need introverts—with their expertise in observing social dynamics—seated around the risk management committee table. The outspoken, confident extroverts on the team will help ensure that a wide range of issues are considered, while the quieter introverts will be invaluable in helping the team see the nuanced nature of risk in your world.

Melanie Lockwood Herman is Executive Director of the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. She welcomes your

ideas about any risk management topic, feedback on this article and questions about the Center's resources at Melanie@nonprofitrisk.org or 703.777.3504. The Center provides risk management tools and resources at www.nonprofitrisk.org/ and offers [consulting assistance](#) to organizations unwilling to leave their missions to chance.