Modern Etiquette: How introverts can survive the party season

SEATTLE (Reuters Life!, 2012) - Are you secretly dreading holiday party invitations in your mailbox?

Would you prefer to share celebrations with one person or a few friends rather than a big party? Do you feel drained after social situations, even when you've enjoyed yourself? Do you become grouchy if you're around people or activities too long?

If you answered, "Yes," to these questions, you are probably an introvert like me, and find the holiday entertaining season draining when it's supposed to be joyful.
Until I married an extravert, I never truly appreciated the fact that introverts and extraverts are simply hardwired that way. Parties energize extraverts, but drain the rest of us.

The kicker is that we are very sociable. We appear to be having a swell time - and very often we are - so extraverts assume parties are easy for us, and bring us along for more.

"There is a whole culture developed around introverts having to hide to get what they need," said Dr. Larry Richard, a psychologist who heads the Leadership & Organization Development practice at Hildebrandt Baker Robbins, and an expert on the famed Myers-Briggs Type Indicator personality test.

"Extraverts don't understand introverts nearly as well as introverts understand extraverts."

Studies indicate that introverts naturally generate elevated levels of electrical stimulation in the neo-cortex, and burn a great deal of glucose, Richard said. That takes energy, which is why we introverts can feel exhausted after a party, when others want to keep going into the wee hours.

"Introverts are born with brains that generate more stimulation
than extraverted brains. Their job in life is to meter what comes in and with so much going on already in their brains, they don't need help from the outside."

TAKE TIME OUT

On the flip side, Richard said that since extraverts seek outside stimulation "what could be better than chasing after fire engines or inviting 300 of your closest friends to lunch?"

Then how do introverts conquer the holiday crush?

For myself, I learned to breathe, focus, and meditate on-demand. Years ago I took the Silva Mind Development program, which proved to be one of my best investments. I can excuse myself from a party, go to the restroom, and recharge in a minute or even less. Except for someone who's really gotta go, who would interrupt someone behind a closed bathroom door?

Perhaps that's an etiquette topic for another column.

Somewhat more difficult is saying "No" to invitations. Practice saying: "Thanks so much. I'd be there if I did not already have plans that night."
Your "plan" can be watching plants grow or paint dry. You need not give a reason. The key is to sound decisive rather than apologetic.

Richard agreed, saying: The number one job for an introvert is figuring out how to manage energy, to build in time for solitude and reflection."

Talking to one person at a time is another helpful tactic. I often seek out another person who seems to be solo. I introduce myself and say: "I don't know anybody here. How are you connected to the host?"
Handshaking Tips

First, when do you shake hands? Be sure to shake hands under these circumstances:

- When another person offers his or her hand
- When you meet someone
- When you greet guests, or when you greet the host or hostess
- When you renew an acquaintance
- When you say goodbye.

Looking for a foolproof way to avoid the knuckle-cruncher and the limp-fish “finger” handshakes? Both are bad news in a business context, as is the infamous two-handed shake. (I call this the “gloved handshake,” and it’s fine if you happen to be consoling someone or you are a member of the clergy.)

The secret to avoiding getting - or giving - a cronic or a "finger" shake is to get your hand all the way into the other person's hand so that the web between your thumb and index finger makes contact with that of the other person, locking thumb to thumb. Women sometimes make the mistake of standing too close while shaking hands with a taller man. This causes the woman to lean or rock backward to make eye contact. When this happens, the perception is that she is backing away from authority. It's better to stop a little short and then step in or lean in a bit.

- Extend your hand open, with fingers together. Never offer fingertips only, causing a weak, limp handshake.
- Plant your feet firmly so that you don't rock.
- Keep eye contact.

Remember: The only appropriate physical contact in the business world is the handshake. Touching in any other way —including draping your arm on someone's shoulder or patting another person on the back - is inappropriate.
A Dozen Don'ts for Social Gatherings

Here are the easiest ways to sabotage yourself at a social gathering:

1. Not listening.
2. Weak handshake.
3. Negative body language.
4. Smoking.
5. Holding drink in right hand.
6. Dressing down - removing jackets, loosening ties, etc.
7. Getting tipsy - too much booze.
8. Invading personal space - standing too close.
9. Loud, boisterous talking.
10. Staying too late.
11. Touching others beyond the handshake.
12. Interrupting.
Conversation Triggers

You are primed, pumped, and ready to rock. You've got your introduction down. You know your agenda for the long and short terms. You're looking good, feeling good. You're ready to effectively network!

Now, here are some sample conversational openers to get you thinking nimbly:

• Are you a sports fan? (Try to relate sports questions to the locale in which you find yourself.)

• Athletic skill you wish you’ve mastered

• Do you enjoy movies? (“I heard an interview on NPR about movies that make men cry…”)

• Greatest movie you’ve not seen

• Did you grow up in this climate? (“Such long, dark days are new for me here in Seattle. Are you used to them? What kind of weather are you used to? What was it like to grow up there? What brought you here?)

• “I don’t know anybody here. Do you?”

• “On my way here, I noticed…”

• “Breakfast is my favorite meal of the day. What is yours?”

• Last purchase you made that made you feel like a grownup (One person told me it actually was purchasing a bag full of rubber bands, because she’d been used to trying to save them from newspapers, etc.)
• Greatest invention of last 25 years (grocery bags with handles, suitcases with wheels, etc.)

• What exactly do you do in your job day-to-day?
• What are the most interesting aspects of your work?
• How do you relieve the stress of your work?
• How did you get into your line of work? What do you find to be the two or three greatest challenges you face?
• Tell me about your career path.
• How did you get to where you are now?
• If you weren’t a ________, what would you be?
• In your educational training, what were the most useful things you learned?
• What books have you read that have been helpful in your career?
• What brought you here today?
• What do you do for fun?

**Note:** Now, remember, you don't just charge up to a person or a group and start firing statements or questions at will. Wait for a break in the conversation, or for someone to turn to you for a comment or introduction. Remember that, in order to engage another person, it is important that you share something of yourself. And be ready to think on your feet!
"What I hear, I forget; what I see, I remember; what I do, I understand.”
---Confucius, 453 B.C.

BREAK-OUT EXERCISE: INTRODUCING OTHERS

Introduction 1
INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO SENIOR PARTNER OF IP LAW FIRM
Person #1 is the introducer Name________________________
Person #2 is Senior Partner Name_____________________

REMINDER: Look at each person as you say his/her name.

Introduction 2
INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO HR EXECUTIVE AT PHARMACEUTICAL FIRM
Person #1 is the introducer Name_______________________
Person #2 is the HR Executive Name___________________

REMINDER: Look at each person as you say his/her name.

Introduction 3
INTRODUCE TWO COLLEAGUES TO EACH OTHER
Person #1 is the introducer Name_______________________
Person #2 is first peer Name__________________________
Person #3 is second peer Name________________________

REMINDER: Look at each person as you say his/her name.

EXERCISE

The following guidelines will help you with introductions. Write out the names of two persons you wish to introduce and do the following:

- Stand in front of a mirror and conduct some private role playing

- Introduce two imaginary persons, looking first at one as you say her name and then at the other as you say his name.

- Repeat this procedure until you are comfortable with introductions. Take your time. Do not try to rush and get it over with.