

Work Daze: Introvert needs work

by *Bob_Goldman*

Are you a shy guy or a bashful babe? At parties, would you rather talk to another guest or network with a potted plant? Do you cringe at confrontation and run away from run-ins? If so, you may be an introvert. You may also be wondering how and where in the world you can get work that works with your particular personality profile.

Well, it's a happy day for introverts. The extroverts at JIST Publishing have produced a new book with the liberating title, "200 Best Jobs for Introverts."

Imagine! Instead of hiding under your desk when the boss calls a meeting, now you can put your finger on a gig that not only tolerates your inability to make eye contact, but rewards it.

According to the publisher's press release, nearly a quarter of the nation's population is introverted. (There may be more, but when the survey team knocked on their doors, the introverts inside were too freaked to answer.)

"Typically, introverts prefer to work alone," the news release states, "in the quiet, and with as few distractions as possible. These characteristics make it increasingly difficult for introverts in an economy that thrives on communication and teamwork."

Personally, I can't imagine how a person would not embrace every distraction that comes their way. It's the distractions that keep us from doing our work and therefore, keep us sane. But I do understand why it may be difficult for an introvert to get a job. The idea of going to an interview is enough to send any introvert running for a nice, quiet closet where they can cuddle up in the dark with their blankie.

But even if you can muster up the nerve to undergo an interview, the job possibilities are shrinking for people who don't like people.

"The U.S. economy has shifted toward service industries such as health care and hospitality," points out co-author Lawrence Shatkin, Ph.D. "As result, more and more opportunities will be found in jobs that involve a lot of interpersonal contact, and chances to work alone will become more scarce. Even jobs in manufacturing are increasingly being done by teams of workers."

To ascertain which industries are introvert-friendly, Shatkin and his team of workers first determined

which jobs allow you to work alone. (And no, we're not talking about your job. You work alone because no one wants to work with you.) This measure they called "independence." The team also looked at a "work-context feature called 'contact with others.'" This variable reflects how frequently you have to deal with other folks over the telephone or in the dreaded face to face.

Jobs with high "independence" ratings and low "contact with others" scores are considered ideal for introverts, as well as for leprosy sufferers and career criminals in a witness protection program.

The final twist on the rating system was to determine which jobs had the best growth potential. I suppose growth is important to make the book valuable to the future generations of lonely, weirdo outcasts.

As you might expect, the best jobs for introverts involve computers. Network system analysts and computer software engineers lead the list, with technical writers not far behind. Medical scientists turn up as the No. 3 best gig unless you are so profoundly introverted that you not only can't communicate with people, you also can't relate to lab rats. Whatever it is these people do, hydrologists rate the No. 4 position.

The math gene must somehow be tied to introvert DNA because actuaries, appraisers, accountants and auditors also appear in the top 10. And you do have to admit that very few CPAs stand out as fun folks to have a party. Unless, of course, you have free food and complimentary cocktails. The green eyeshade crowd may not be very sociable, but they can't resist a free meal.

The most surprising job category on the top 10 best list for introverts is animal trainer. What's surprising is not that it's a good job for introverts, but that it carries a growth potential of 20.3 percent. This is certainly good news for Siegfried or Roy, whichever one survived the most recent mauling and is looking to get back in the cage.

So maybe animal trainer is a good job. I'm no introvert, but I know I'd sure rather face a Siberian tiger than come face to face with the director of HR.

Bob Goldman has been an advertising executive at a Fortune 500 company in the San Francisco Bay area. He offers a virtual shoulder to cry on at bob@funnybusiness.com.

Work Daze: Introvert needs work by Bob_Goldman