



What If I'm Shy?

By Rebecca Nappi, *The Spokesman-Review*

Whenever I do talks to young people about journalism, I give them a quiz to see if they have all the skills they'll need, right now, to be a journalist in the future. They answer yes or no to a dozen questions. One of the questions is this: Do you consider yourself a shy person? If they answer yes, I tell them it might be a good sign.

A shy journalist? Seems counterintuitive. But then I tell them that in my almost 30 years as a newspaper journalist, I have worked mostly with people who would describe themselves as inherently shy. Introverts think a long time before speaking. They let the extroverts, like me, open our mouths and leave "no thought left unspoken" as my brother-in-law so aptly describes the talkers among us.

Being shy is not fatal to a print journalism career. Former journalist turned consultant, Sharon L. Peters, studied the introversion-extroversion phenomenon in newsrooms. Fifty-seven percent of reporters are introverts, she discovered, while introverts make up only 30 percent of the general population.

Introverts often make excellent journalists, because they tend to be more patient listeners than extroverts and they don't interject as much about themselves in interviews. And some introverted journalists I've known over the years have told me that when they have the "protection" of a notebook or a camera, they feel more open and brave. Taking notes also allows them to avoid excessive eye contact.

Going to third spaces as an introvert is more challenging than conventional reporting, however. In third spaces, you have to chat with people. Conversation demands give and take. If possible, an introvert can buddy up with an extrovert with the understanding that once the extrovert gets the conversation rolling, the introvert must step in, too. If the shy reporter has a rehearsed explanation of why he or she is there, that helps, because for introverts the hardest part of conversation seems to be getting it in motion. And the shy reporter can even say how awkward it feels to strike up a conversation with a stranger but they have to because it's a class assignment. Most people, I've discovered, will take care of others.

And most of the population is made up of extroverts, so chances are the shy reporter will stumble into one. They will soon find these extroverts are eager to chat and tell their stories. It doesn't take much to get them going.