

Your clients' attitudes toward money reveals more than what's in their wallet.

Hey, Big Spender!

By Laurie A. Helgoe

YOU ARE HAVING LUNCH WITH A GROUP of acquaintances. Financially, you're in excellent shape. When the waiter asks if you want separate checks, do you insist the bill be brought to you? If your answer is, "Of course," we might assume that you are a generous person. If your answer is, "Probably not," we might assume that you're selfish.

In either case, we might be wrong.

Let's look at a different scenario: You find yourself preoccupied; your mood has been consistently low, and no matter how hard you try, you can't seem to get past the complaints you were dealing with a year ago. You feel stuck! Do you ignore the problem, call a friend or family member for advice, or set up an appointment to begin therapy?

How you respond in this scenario has to do with a different kind of generosity. If you spend money to talk to a therapist about your problems, we might see you as selfish or indulgent and want you to focus on the other people in your life.

We might have that all wrong, too.

Our prevailing assumptions do not apply to a major segment of the population: introverts. If you think introverts are in the minority, you may not be alone, but you are mistaken. If you think introverts are "antisocial," or that introversion is a mental disorder you're wrong again! You may even be wrong about yourself!

Introversion is simply an inward orientation to life. Introverts generally find the inner world of ideas more comfortable and more interesting than society. For introverts, reflecting gives energy; interacting takes energy away. That's it. Being an introvert does not mean you are shy, socially phobic, depressed, avoidant, geeky, weird or plotting to take over the world. And, for heaven's sake, introversion has nothing to do with being "antisocial." Antisocial Personality Disorder is the diagnosis for people who lack a social conscience—the people we used to call sociopaths!

At least half of you out there are introverts. You're not big on parties. Your idea of relaxation is an evening alone or with

someone close to you. In conversation, you prefer to "take turns" and allow each participant enough airtime to express complete thoughts. Fast-paced, back-and-forth or gossipy conversations either overstimulate or bore you. You think before you speak, which is why you may prefer communicating in writing.

So let's go back to the scenarios I introduced. Remember the jolly fellow who likes to spring for drinks, dinner—for whatever is going on socially? He may be a heckuva guy—as they say in my native Minnesota—but picking up the tab may also be self-serving. Extroverts are energized by social interaction, so he'll want as much fuel as he can get. Lightening the tab for others adds to the cheer, keeps things flowing, and encourages people to relax and stick around.

Meanwhile, the reserved member of the group—the one who typically asks for a separate check and probably also leaves early—may spend so little because the social scene is not his thing. This is a group of "acquaintances," after all, and

he's already "spent" the effort to make an appearance. He may not be willing to spend any more.

Now let's look at the second scenario. To an extrovert, who invests more in social interaction, sharing problems with friends or family feeds the social economy. Others feel "needed," and the extrovert gets help—a win-win situation.

Introverts operate on a different economy. Several studies have documented that brains of introverts are more regularly stimulated than the brains of extroverts. Extroverts, who have less ongoing internal stimulation, crave the "action" of more people, more talk and more interaction. Hearing about your problems may not be an extrovert's favorite source of stimulation, but it adds to the mix.

Introverts, on the other hand, shield themselves from too much stimulation. Listening to a friend talk endlessly about her problems feels burdensome to the introvert. An introvert is being respectful

of relationships—generous, even—when she decides to pursue therapy rather than using the "friends and family" plan. Therapy also meets her personal needs for privacy and attention to her inner life. Another win-win!

Though many other factors affect the choices we make in these situations, it is extremely helpful to understand the implications of introversion and extroversion on personal finance. Extroverts thrive on interaction, on exchange, and they are more ready to exchange money as well—to trade, to mix it up. Introverts thrive on inner action, and are more likely to invest in good ideas and compelling visions.

The automatic tendency is to equate an internal orientation with stinginess or selfishness. But this judgment says more about society's bias toward extroversion than about the quality of character.

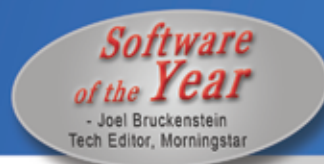
When we deal with money, judgments abound. We all do it, looking skeptically

at Uncle Joe's boat purchase or Cousin Mary's apparent tight-fistedness. We also judge ourselves, wondering why we can't be more like the friend who gives so much or the relative who saves so much. But when it comes to your clients, your judgments about money are what you are being paid to offer. Instead of asking, "Is my client generous or cheap?" try observing your client carefully and asking yourself, "How does my client prefer to be generous?" and "Where does my client set limits?"

Your client will appreciate your generosity.

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