Early Career Members

Being an Introvert in the Ag World

by Alexandra Wright

If you spend much time on the internet, you have probably come across an article or two about extraversion vs. introversion, as it has become a hot topic these days. Extraversion-introversion is one of the “Big Five” dimensions of personality (the others being neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and intellect/imagination). An introvert is described as a person whose interest is generally directed inward toward his/her own feelings and thoughts, whereas an extrovert’s attention is directed toward other people and the outside world.

Although extraversion-introversion has been around since it was first classified by 20th century Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, it has only recently begun to gain popularity as a way to truly distinguish between personalities. In fact, when I was a child, my introversion was improperly labelled as “shyness.” This could be because I did not partake in much small talk. Rather, as is characteristic of introverts, I preferred to talk about concepts and ideas. I could talk non-stop and with much passion—provided it was the right topic! It is now understood that, on a basic level, an introvert is a person who is energized by being alone and whose energy is drained by being around other people. People who prefer introversion usually have a very rich inner life, while people who prefer extraversion usually enrich their own ideas by interacting with others. This in no way means that introverts don’t “like” people or are anti-social; it just means they need alone time to recharge their batteries after spending time with people. In contrast, extroverts gain energy by being with other people and oftentimes are uncomfortable being alone.

Neither extraversion nor introversion is “better” than the other, although western culture tends to place a higher value on extraversion. That is to say, people are rewarded on their sociability and ability to appear outgoing and outspoken. In reality, there are positives and negatives to both, and oftentimes, people are not strictly an introvert or extrovert—many are ambiverts who act as an extrovert in certain situations and an introvert in others.

Find a Job that Suits Your Strengths

Still, in an extroverted world (with one-half to two-thirds of the population being extroverts), it may seem difficult to thrive as introvert. My advice to the introverts out there is to be true to yourself. Don’t pretend to be something you are not because it can be very draining. If you are analytic and do your best thinking alone—then find a job, such as a research scientist for a private company or the government, that caters toward this. Do what is most suited to your strengths, and surround yourself with a supportive environment—one that is not overwhelmed by team meetings and a lot of social interaction.

The fast-paced, high-pressure environment of sales, for example, might not work for you. And, then again—it might. Sales in agriculture is a lot different from other industries since we are providing solutions to our farm customers with specific, seasonal needs. It’s not like trying to sell someone a car because a farmer needs seed and fertilizer every year to grow a good crop. In fact, I actually did quite well in my years as a seed industry district sales manager. As an introvert, I tended to ask a lot of questions and listen intently. Instead of trying to sell a product because it’s the newest to the market, I actually listened to the needs of the farmer and tried to find the right product for his/her specific operation. In that respect, it didn’t even feel like sales because I was offering a service that should help the farmer improve his/her operation. So don’t consider being an introvert to be a weakness—instead build upon your strengths (such as good listening skills)!

If you like spending a lot of time alone and enjoy interacting in only small groups or one-on-one, an agronomist might be the right role for you. In the private sector, an agronomist role would really be a sales support role, but you most likely wouldn’t be taking orders. Instead you might go out one-on-one with a farmer to evaluate certain aspects of his/her agronomic practices or trouble shoot unhealthy fields. You would probably be involved in some aspect of social media—keeping customers up to date on growing conditions and impending threats, such as disease and insect outbreaks. Oftentimes, introverts are more comfortable sharing their ideas in writing because it gives them time to think critically and process their thoughts, whereas extroverts are more likely to verbally share ideas right away and thrive in a teamwork-driven/group-meetings type environment.

These are just a few examples, but there are unlimited opportunities in agriculture. Just look for a job that plays to continued on page 46