

# Stat Watch



**DAILY STAT** To receive HBR's Daily Stat by e-mail, sign up at [www.hbr.org/dailystat](http://www.hbr.org/dailystat).

## 500 Billion

That's the number of impressions that consumers share with others online about products and services annually, say **Josh Bernoff** and **Ted Schadler**, Forrester Research analysts and the authors of *Empowered*. More than 60% of those impressions are shared on Facebook, and 16% of users generate 80% of messages and posts about products and services.

Big sale at Macy's today—20% off everything in the store!



DON'T EAT AT JOE'S



The Fighter is the best movie I've seen this year.



**LEADERSHIP** by Adam M. Grant, Francesca Gino, and David A. Hofmann

# The Hidden Advantages of Quiet Bosses

It's conventional wisdom that's supported by a decade of academic research: Extroverts make the best leaders. These people—dominant and outgoing—are favored in hiring and promotion decisions, and they're perceived to be more effective by supervisors and subordinates alike. But our research suggests that in certain situations, an introvert may make the better boss.

To be sure, extroverted leaders have important strengths. However, they also tend to command the center of attention and take over discussions. In a dynamic, unpredictable environment, introverts are often more effective leaders—particularly when workers are proactive, offering ideas for improving the business. Such behavior can make extroverted leaders feel threatened. In contrast, introverted leaders tend to listen more carefully and show greater receptivity to suggestions, making them more effective leaders of vocal teams.

To test this idea, we conducted a field study, in which we sent questionnaires to managers and employees at 130 franchises of a U.S. pizza delivery company. We asked bosses to rate how extroverted they considered themselves, and asked employees to estimate how often they and their colleagues “try to bring about improved procedures,” among other proactive behaviors. We collected data on each store's profitability, controlling for variables such as whether the franchise was in a high-volume college town. The results showed that in stores

where employees weren't very proactive, extroverted leadership was associated with 16% higher profits than average—but in franchises where workers offered ideas, extroverted leadership was associated with 14% lower profits.

We also conducted a lab experiment in which we asked 163 college students to work in groups to see how many T-shirts they could fold in 10 minutes. Each group had a leader and four followers, two of whom were research assistants posing as followers. To manipulate the behavior of the leaders, we had each read a statement before the activity began: Some read a statement extolling extroverted leaders (like JFK and Martin Luther King, Jr.); oth-

ers read a statement praising reserved leaders (like Gandhi and Abraham Lincoln). We also predisposed some followers toward proactive behavior. For instance, some of the researcher-followers stopped their groups after 90 seconds and suggested a better way to do the task. The groups with proactive followers performed better under an introverted leader—folding, on average, 28% more T-shirts. The extroverted leaders appeared threatened by and unreceptive to proactive employees. The introverted leaders listened carefully and made employees feel valued, motivating them to work hard.

To succeed as leaders, introverts may have to overcome a strong cultural bias. In a 2006 survey, 65% of senior corporate executives viewed introversion as a barrier to leadership, and other studies have shown that highly extroverted U.S. presidents are perceived as more effective.

But it's worth reexamining that stereotype. While it's often true that extroverts make the best bosses and proactive employees make the best workers, combining the two can be a recipe for failure. Soft-spoken leaders may get the most out of proactive employees—so save the outgoing, talkative managers for teams that function best when they're told what to do. ▣

HBR Reprint F1012B

### EXTROVERTS RISE TO THE TOP

Whereas just 50% of the general population is extroverted, 96% of managers and executives display extroverted personalities. And the higher you go in a corporate hierarchy, the more likely you are to find highly extroverted individuals. The chart below, based on a 2009 study of 4,000 managers across U.S. industries, shows the percentage of managers at each level who display high levels of extroversion.



SOURCE DENIZ ONES AND STEPHAN DILCHERT, "HOW SPECIAL ARE EXECUTIVES?" *INDUSTRIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY*, 2009

**Adam M. Grant** is an associate professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School. **Francesca Gino** is an associate professor at Harvard Business School. **David A. Hofmann** is a professor at the University of North Carolina's Kenan-Flagler Business School.