

FOR SOME,
**SOLITUDE IN WORK LIFE
 HAS BEEN A GOOD THING**

BY ELEANOR BLOXHAM

For many, the transition during the pandemic to working from home has been challenging, with no live interaction, lunch companionship, or kitchen area banter.

But for a few, the pandemic has created a beneficial shift: a quieter work environment in which to think, slowly and carefully, away from the noise of fellow workers and constant interruptions.

Why the difference in feeling?

A 2016 study of more than 15,000 survey respondents in the *British Journal of Psychology* provides an explanation by identifying a group for whom quiet and solitude can, in fact, create happiness. Namely, the highly intelligent.

According to the research by professors from Singapore Management University and the London School of Economics, for most people, life satisfaction increases with the “frequency of socialization.” However, the study found that this “association is reversed among the extremely intelligent.”

One of the researchers, in an *Inverse* interview, explained that the difference in response may have to do with the fact that the extremely intelligent gain less benefit from social interactions

than do others. As the thinking goes, this is because those blessed intellectually are better able than others to solve problems on their own without input or help.

Before the pandemic, noise and distracted atmospheres had been the norm in many people’s lives. Packed restaurants made quiet conversation extremely difficult. And diners, increasingly disassociated from their table companions, could be seen urgently texting others who were miles away.

The addiction to motion had created workplaces focused on reacting and doing rather than thinking and planning.

The result? Less-than-quality outcomes for patients of clinics and hospitals, and for consumers of technology, as just two examples.

Most every spiritual tradition talks about the need for time alone, for contemplation and thinking.

David Vincent, author of *The History of Solitude*, writes of the importance of monkish traditions. Buddhists advocate meditation. Many prayers are often silent.

At the same time, spiritual traditions recognize the importance of both being out in the world and being alone and removed from the world’s activity.

Workplaces, however, have tended to fall into the trap of the lowest common denominator. How many job ads today use the worn-out phrase “fast-paced environment” but fail to include “able to think and reason successfully on one’s own”?

It is important to tap into the quiet within us. Einstein is credited with saying, “No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.” To find that other level of consciousness to solve big problems, it pays to take a pause in solitude to find a way.

Inside workplaces, we need to strive to give others that gift. As the *Inverse* article cautions us, we gain by respecting those whose preference is to be alone. It may just be they are extremely smart and work better that way.



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