

Extroverts Need Rest and Restoration, Too, Even If It Doesn't Look Like Rest.

by Beth A. D. Nolan, PhD

The broken oak branch suspended by trees 50 feet in the air was truly a widow maker: 30 feet long, and the size of a dinner plate at the base. As I worked away on my computer that Friday, I had a view out my window of my husband dealing with it. He met with the arborist early in the morning to bring it down, cut the lengths with a chainsaw, heave them into rows to dry for later splitting, and begin the long process of pruning the leaves from the smaller branches for stacking for kindling. It was a full day of solitary, hard work.

It was 5:30 that evening when I got the invitation from close friends to come over for an evening swim. I could feel the computer strain on my eyes from my daylong race to beat incoming emails and finish the proposal. I was delighted with the idea of a visit with friends in a pool. But how to present this to my introverted husband such that he would go? I knew he must be exhausted; a cool swim would be just the trick to stretch sore muscles.

PPA™ to the rescue!! I approached him with a cold beer, commented on the remarkable size of the branch and thus, the job, and we chatted about the humidity and deer flies he battled that day. Then I mentioned we had an invitation to our friends' home to cool off in the pool. I may have imagined this, but I swear he glanced longingly at his half-finished book on the table inside the living room window. I waited, giving him time to make his own decision.

"Yeah," he sighed. "It would be good to get together with them, and a swim sounds great right about now. I'll go get cleaned up."

Success! I would have my restoration.

So what is rest and restoration? It's how we recharge our batteries. For extroverts, the simple solution to rest and restoration is by being around people. Time taken with others to connect, to engage, and to converse helps many extroverts restore themselves. But there are other ways that may not be so obvious:

- Going to see a play or a band
- Hosting a party
- Taking a class such as painting, cooking, or aerobics
- Attending a worship service

Even these activities, while not inherently talking with people, can be stimulating enough for extroverts to gain their energy. Extroverts are usually seen as sociable, active, and outgoing. However, some extroverts are shy, so they might not appear so outgoing all the time. Given a bit of time to overcome the anxiety of the approach, even shy extroverts will regain their vigor through the interaction.

So why do extroverts respond in this manner to stimulation, when introverts prefer time alone to recharge? Research points to a variety of reasons, including the manner in which the brain processes the compounds acetylcholine and dopamine. They act as neurotransmitters in the brain to processes incoming stimuli. It appears as though for extroverts, very simply put, the stimulation is more strongly processed in a shorter pathway and dopamine pushes them to seek out novel stimuli and unfamiliar situations more than introverts. For introverts, a complex process involves not only the portion of the brain where the stimuli are processed, but many other portions including the frontal lobe for planning and solving problems, and the limbic system for memory and emotion. In short, introverts process stimuli in a different pathway than extroverts and need that time alone to process and recharge.

So what about that recharging after a day at the computer and cutting branches? Would a social activity at a pool be enough to restore both? Not likely. But it sure was refreshing for this extrovert.