



Episode One: The Long Runway

Advertisement:

Today's show is brought to you by Squarespace. Start building your website today at Squarespace dot com. Enter offer code QUIET at checkout to get 10% off. Squarespace—Build it Beautiful.

And by Audible, who has more than 180,000 audiobooks and spoken word audio products. Get a free 30 day trial and free audiobook at audible.com/quiet.

Podcast:

JAY: Well I hate speaking out. Cause I'm nervous...and right now I'm nervous.

MARGOT: You don't want to be the one to be wrong when you raise your hand.

DAVIS: I was the only one who after school wanted to go in my room and just recharge while everyone else was outside playing.

SONIA: He needs a little bit of warm up for everything. Once he's warmed up, Wow! He will impress you like you could not even imagine he could do those things!

LARA: I've learned so much from just watching her and just been dazzled by her intense curiosity and Imagination.

SUSAN: Welcome to Quiet: The Power of Introverts. I am Susan Cain, author of the book "Quiet the power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking" and co-founder of Quiet Revolution.

After the book, "Quiet", came out I started to hear from thousands of people who for the first time in their lives felt like they had permission to be themselves. And I started to realize we needed a quiet revolution. That we needed to empower introverts at work, in leadership positions, and in our culture in general.

At the heart and center of this movement is empowering the next generation of children to know their own strengths

So we put together this podcast, for parents, for educators, and for quiet kids themselves. This is really for anybody who knows that introverted children are normal and wonderful and often grow up to be the world's most interesting, accomplished, and successful people. The world's introverts include everyone from Mahatma Gandhi, to Rosa Parks, to Bill Gates, to Emma Watson. And all these people made their contributions to the world because of—not in spite of—their quiet temperaments. It's also true, of course, that quiet kids can sometimes feel overwhelmed by classrooms and sports leagues and parties and really an entire culture that's geared towards extroverts.

So, think of this podcast series as a guidebook, filled with tips for how to help quiet kids of all ages navigate a loud world, while never letting go of what makes them great. I called this series "The Power of Introverts" for a good reason. Introverts can be deep thinkers, terrific and compassionate leaders, and loyal friends, as you know if you spend a lot of time in the company of an introverted child.

So, for introverted kids, all of this starts with what I call The Long Runway—the extra time and attention some quiet kids need before they take flight.

As I'm sure you've guessed, I was an introverted child myself. I needed that extra runway. When I learned to swim. I needed it when I started middle school. And honestly, I've needed it every step of the way in my adult life, too. When I went to college, and law school, became a corporate lawyer, and launched what became a best-selling book, and later a mission-based organization called Quiet Revolution—devoted to empowering introverts at school and on the job.

Every step of the way, I was on a longer runway.

Over the course of this series, we're going to explore topics such as parent-child compatibility, self-esteem, and whether it's fair to grade kids based on class participation. We'll interview teachers, psychologists, parents and of course the kids themselves. And we'll give you the tools you need to harness your introvert's unique talents and inner riches.

So let's start by meeting a few of these kids.

MARGOT: I'm Margot and I'm 9 years old.

DAVIS: My name is Davis Nguyen. I consider myself an Introvert

MARGOT: I don't really understand the definition of it but my mom, she just thinks I am. I don't know why but she knows me well, so...

DAVIS: I find it hard to connect with other people. And even for recess, that one hour break, all I wanted to do was find a corner or a bench and just read.

MARGOT: Uh, well, I try and find people I know and then we try and find a quiet place and talk.

DAVIS: Looking back there very was truly signs that I was an introvert.

SUSAN: If you want to think about whether you are an introvert or an extrovert ask yourselves three questions. The first one is to imagine that you have been at a party that you have enjoyed (honest to goodness enjoyed) and you've been there for about two hours. If you are an extrovert, at the end of those two hours, your batteries are probably feeling very charged and you want more party time. And if you're an introvert, then you're starting to

wish—dear God—that you are home in your pajamas so that’s one question to ask yourselves. Another is, “do you tend to think before you speak or do you tend to process your thoughts more out loud as extroverts do?” And the one third is, “do you tend to prefer one on one conversations as introverts do, or larger group settings?”

LARA: My name is Lara and I have two daughters and they couldn’t be more different. One is very outgoing and one is more retreating.

SUSAN: A couple of years ago both of Lara’s children were very into Taylor Swift

LARA: My husband got tickets for us all to go. And Margot spent the first hour of the concert in tears. It was just not a good experience for her. But we were on the floor and we did have space around us so it was kind of not a horrible kind of crowd. But any kind of crowd is too much for her

SUSAN: That’s something I can really understand.

I was the kind of kid who was always mystified by when adults organized kids into activities we were always herded into these big group endeavors like, “let’s all get together and sing a song as loudly as we can!” and I would think “why is this ‘fun’ I don’t get it?” And I remember at one point being asked to sing that iconic song “If you’re happy and you know it clap your hands…” and I’d think “I’m not happy right now I was happy five minutes ago (laughs) when I was off doing my own thing, but why I’m doing this I have no idea!”

The difference between introverts and extroverts is based on where do you get your energy? It’s not about shyness, which is the fear of social judgement. Some introverts are shy. Some are not. And shyness is a big piece of our puzzle.

But introversion is about feeling more alive and in a state of equilibrium when you’re in a quieter, lower key environment. While extroverts recharge their batteries by being out and about with lots of people. And this idea of a battery that is either recharged or drained is a useful way of looking at it. But it’s really just a metaphor for what is often happening on a neurobiological level with introverts and extroverts literally having different nervous systems.

CARL: Human babies come into the world with distinct behavioral profiles that you can see at about four months of age.

SUSAN: That’s Dr. Carl Schwartz. He runs the Developmental Neuroimaging & Psychopathology Research Laboratory at Massachusetts General Hospital.

CARL: If you show them a variety of stimuli like a mobile, a whiff of butyl alcohol under their nose, various sounds, you begin to see that there are very different patterns of reaction. They start crying when they are exposed to these kinds of stimuli, they arch their backs, they thrash their legs, those are the babies we call high motor, high cry babies, and their [kind of] polar opposite are the babies who are very placid to these exact same stimuli that we call the “low reactive”. And it turns out that these babies who are the high reactive—the thrashing arching crying babies—are babies who when they become toddlers, are much more likely to show things that we would recognise as early forms of shyness in young children.

SUSAN: In a minute we’re going to find out why these babies are so sensitive. But first I want to share this message from our sponsors.

Advertisement:

This episode is sponsored by Squarespace. It's more important than ever to have an online presence for your brand or business. Creating your own website used to mean struggling to learn some fundamental web code or choosing a pre-made template that you couldn't customize. I remember this so well. Well, times have changed and Squarespace is the answer.

Squarespace makes designing your own website easy with intuitive and easy-to-use tools. You'll have a beautiful site that looks professionally-designed regardless of your skill level, and the best part is there's no coding required!

*Start your free trial site today at [Squarespace.com](https://www.squarespace.com). When you decide to sign up for Squarespace, make sure to use the offer code **QUIET** to get 10% off your first purchase.*

Squarespace. Build it Beautiful.

This episode is also sponsored by Audible.com, of whom I am a huge fan and carry their books around me everywhere I go on my phone. In contemplating who you are as a person, whether you're an introvert or an extrovert, it's always a good thing to do a bit of research. There are thousands of books out there to help you learn more about yourself, and a great way to discover these books, as I can attest, is through Audible.com.

With Audible you can browse more than 180,000 audiobooks and spoken-word audio products from the leading audiobook publishers, broadcasters, entertainers, and magazine and newspaper publishers.

*Find audio books like *The Gifts of Imperfection* by Brené Brown, who's a good friend of mine, and who's a leading expert on shame, authenticity, and belonging. She shares what she's learned from a decade of research on the power of Wholehearted Living, which is a way of engaging with the world from a place of worthiness.*

If you want to listen to this book or any other of Audible's thousands of titles, you can get a free 30-day trial and a free audiobook today by signing up at [Audible.com/quiet](https://www.audible.com/quiet). That's [Audible.com/quiet](https://www.audible.com/quiet) [audible.com/quiet](https://www.audible.com/quiet).

Podcast:

SUSAN: Before the break we learned that some babies are much more sensitive to sights and sounds than others. So I asked Carl Schwartz whose groundbreaking research is based on this finding: What exactly is happening neurobiologically that makes these babies react so much more intensely to stimuli when they are four months old and then even later in life?

CARL: Well, in our first study to try to look at that question we took a group of 21 year olds who had been seen when they were two year of age, and our working hypothesis was that these children were characterized by having a more jumpy or reactive amygdala to novelty and that turned out to be the case. We then were curious about how early this could be detected and that's when we wound back to the high and low reactive babies. And we found the same signature of a jumpy amygdala in adults who had been high reactive much earlier in life than the first study where we just looked at two year olds. That really put the mark in the sand that you really could detect, even after years of development and whatever the environmental differences and how babies were raised and parented and their life experiences — through all that noise you could still see the signal.

JAY: My name is Jay and I like ping pong and piano. And I'm in second grade.

SONIA: My name is Sonia and my son's name is Jay. I don't want to call him exactly shy, but definitely reserved. Jay feels like a very old soul. Like somehow he had another life before to talk with such knowledge.

Jay: My friend Luca, we always help each other with stuff. And we love to play tag but not at recess because Luca plays with a bunch of other kids and I only play with Mathus. Because I made up this game in kindergarten that I still play—an imaginary game.

SUSAN: The long runway is a really useful metaphor for quiet children. Just as different kinds of aircraft take off in different ways, some kids are helicopters who just jump right into the air, while others need more time and tarmac to gather speed. Once they do take flight, there's almost no limit to how far they can go. And it's so important to remember that.

It's the job of the adults in these kids lives to make sure we spot what each child needs, and not shove them into the air before they're ready.

DAVIS: For a while, for pretty much throughout elementary school, I felt that something was wrong with me. I thought if other kids could do it why couldn't I do it?

SUSAN: That's Davis Nguyen again.

DAVIS: My parents would say the same thing as in—my cousins were all outgoing but I was the only one having trouble making friends. I wanted to be like the other kids. I wanted to be normal. And if you weren't an extrovert then you were an outcast.

SUSAN: Dr. Carl Schwartz has seen what can happen when extroverted parents misread what their own quiet kids need.

CARL: Parents often seek to impose their worldview of what is a successful functioning person on their child. I remember one of the kids in our study who was the son of a very prominent trial attorney. So this father's idea of being a man was to be verbally aggressive, combative and he had a son who was anything but that. He was more thoughtful more pensive, he was athletic but he was more a tennis player than a football player. He played sports that were individual sports and his father really didn't really get him so perennially kind of made this kid feel inadequate as a kid, and you can imagine after he hit adolescence, not manly in certain ways and that was an extremely destructive dynamic. So parents have to sort-of recognize that if you happen to be extroverted and your kid is introverted you need to recognize and honor that difference.

JENNIFER KOTELES: It breaks my heart when I see parents or teachers forcing a quiet child to talk, to contribute, to be a part of an assembly, or sing to as a part of a choir. There are certain kids that are not going to feel comfortable doing that and that has to be ok.

SUSAN: That's Jennifer Koteles, a teacher who is especially thoughtful about the quiet kids in her classroom.

JENNIFER: Our goal as a teacher is that they will eventually get to the place where they are comfortable speaking up at an assembly or speaking in class or singing at the concert and if you are forcing them to do it before they are ready then it's just going to backfire.

SUSAN I'm going to tell a personal story here because I think it encapsulates this so well. When I was in middle school I had a very traumatic experience with public speaking where a teacher hauled me in front of the room unprompted and asked me to improvise a scene from Macbeth where I was supposed to play Lady Macbeth and I froze and couldn't do it

and had to ultimately go and take my seat again having sort of failed to do this and I was mortified. And for decades after that public speaking was this terrible phobia that I had.

CARL: You don't help a person's fear of flying by throwing them into a 747, strapping them down, and taking them onto a nonstop flight to China.

SUSAN: Again, here's Dr. Carl Schwartz of Massachusetts General Hospital.

CARL: You might take them to the airport first. Watch the airplanes take off and land. Have them talk to a pilot. Help them understand that the landing gear makes a noise going up and down, that that's not the engines dropping off. In other words a slow introduction but nonetheless gently forcing them into a world in which they are afraid. And it's really, it's really finding that balance.

SUSAN: And this is really important. The goal is not to shield quiet kids from anything that makes them uncomfortable. It is to help them overcome their fears in thoughtful, productive ways. It worked for me. The girl who couldn't improvise Lady Macbeth is now, somehow, a woman who speaks to large groups all over the world. My rule of thumb is think of anxiety level on a scale of one to ten and you want your child stretching themselves in the four to six range. If you're in the seven to ten range, it's probably counter-productive.

CARL: It's important to be in that bandwidth, scary but not horrible. Or challenging but not super scary (when you're a child you want to be challenged, not scared). Because we know if you can't hang in there in that challenging situation long enough for your body to get calm again, for your heart rate to come down, for the sweatiness to go away, for the lump in your throat to relax. If you're in that situation and you don't get to go through that relaxation instead of getting desensitized there is this phenomena of "sensitization." You actually make it worse.

DAVIS: One of the things I did in middle school was I ran for student body president.

SUSAN: Davis decided to challenge his anxiety scale.

DAVIS: I was at the time 13 years old and it was the first time that I was forced to speak in front of large bodies of students and I was terrified. I was trying to be a little more social every day. I would stretch myself but I was always scared that at any moment what if someone found I was faking it. And it would all come down and I lose and I'm just humiliated for the rest of eighth grade.

SUSAN: But Davis did not let his anxiety stop him..

DAVIS: I ended up winning because the people really loved the ideas that I proposed. Even though, before the election, I would say less than one percent of the school knew who I was. So I would say that some of the strengths that I thought were weaknesses in elementary school really came out to be strengths in middle school.

SUSAN: Davis made it down his long runway, and beyond. In another show we're going to be hearing about how he graduated with honors from Yale. And now, as I mentioned earlier in the show, I have some concrete tips for you to help your own child navigate that long runway.

Number one: Wherever you're going, get there early. So, for example, if it's a birthday party it is so much easier for your child to arrive before the other kids get there. When things are still quiet and they can feel as if they own the space before other kids show up. As opposed to entering a noisy situation where the social groups are already formed, and

there sort of entering the situation of cacophony. You can avoid all of that by just getting there early.

Number two: For sticky social situations, you might want to rehearse with your child what they're going to say. I hear a lot from parents who understandably care about manners and worry that when children won't say hello to somebody who greets them. But what you need to know is that your child will say hello eventually. So don't shame them by making them feel bad that they can't do it now. And instead tell them about the time that you felt the same way. And that you overcame it, and you know they will too. And if they're up to it, practice with them what it would feel like to say hello at that moment.

Number three: Break big challenges into small steps and declare victory at the end of each small step. So I'm thinking about one child in particular who went to kindergarten at a new school, where her parents were allowed to walk her into the classroom every day until the day came when the school sent a notice that said, 'now is the time for students to walk inside by themselves.' And the parents when they informed their daughter of this new policy, their daughter burst into tears and said this is the worst day of my life, I can't do it! So she and her parents came up with a plan where they were going to do this little by little. So on the first day they walked her all the way down the stairs to the end of the hallway, and she just walked those last few steps into her classroom. And then a few days later, they dropped her off at the top of the hallway. And then a few days after that they dropped her off at the doors to the school. And then eventually came the day when their child was just running into the school just like all their other kids and the fact that she'd ever been afraid of it became a distant memory. So just keep that in mind as you're heading down that long runway with your children. They will take off and fly.

Advertisement:

SUSAN: If you're the parent of a quiet child ages 3 to 9 I'm so excited to tell you about a new online course we've created that I really think can change the way you parent your child. The course is beautiful and it includes all kinds of interactive features like, for example, a tool to help you decide when and when not to press your child out of her comfort zone. And scripts for how to advocate for your child with people who say he's too shy. And you'll also have the chance to interact with other parents of quiet kids. To check out the course just visit learn.quietrev.com

Credits:

SUSAN: "Quiet: the Power of Introverts" was produced by Kerrie Hillman in partnership with Andy Bowers and Laura Mayer of Panoply. The episode was edited by A.C. Valdez, mixed by Jason Gambrell. Our music was composed by Alexis Cuadrado. Special thanks to the whole team Quiet Revolution. I'm Susan Cain.

Podcast:

Thanks for listening.

SUSAN: How compatible are you and your kid? Whether you're an introvert or an extrovert, you'll want to catch next week's episode with guests Arianna Huffington and her daughter Isabella as they reveal how temperament influences their relationship. We'll also have some great tips to help you find common ground with your quiet child.