



Quiet E8: Quiet at College

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Podcast:

SUSAN: I'm Susan Cain and this is *Quiet: The power of Introverts*.

SUSAN: We're here at Ethical Culture Fieldston Day School in the Riverdale section of the Bronx in New York City. The lush 18 acre campus is one of the top-rated Ivy League prep schools in the country.

Barbara Walters studied here. And J. Robert Oppenheimer—father of the atomic bomb. Even Sofia Coppola...

SUSAN: True to its name, students here take courses in ethics and moral philosophy, and are required to do regular community service. The academic standards are very high and virtually 100 percent of graduates go on to college.

Down the hall, past refreshment tables laden with old pizza boxes and trays of assorted cookies, parents and students are gathered in the student-faculty center to learn what awaits them in the college admissions process. And—even with the odds seemingly stacked in their favor—by the look on their faces, the information is...sobering.

SUSAN: This is Harry Dawe, a college counselor at Fieldston. Just like the parents and students outside his office, he is the man we're here to see.

SUSAN: This is where he sits with each student, peppering them with questions and trying to identify their strengths and weaknesses...

HARRY: And there is an interesting thing that has all sorts of arcane stuff on it—the months of the year and the different seasons all in different languages—and at the bottom there's a passage from the bible with it all written in Latin and if I've got a student who is particularly arrogant about his skills and knowledge I say, "Ok, big guy, go over there and look at that thing and tell me what's being said." So, little things like that give me a sense of what they're made of.

SUSAN: Eventually, Dawe zeros in on a school that he feels is the best fit for each student based on their interests, their academic qualifications, and even their temperament. Then, he writes a college evaluation letter.

HARRY: This is one one them, my quieter people: "Discipline, depth, and gentleness are the hallmarks of this remarkable young woman. Her intellect glows rather than flashes as she pursues her deep and abiding interest in learning and near professional commitment to dance..."

SUSAN: It's an impressive letter for an obviously impressive student—but Harry says, he tries to stay away from the word “quiet.”

HARRY: We did have a session once where we had some admissions officers and they were being asked questions about how they handles admissions and talk about their own particular college or university. And I remember asking the question, “When you see the word ‘quiet,’ in recommendations, is this sort of a red flag for them?” And the general consensus was yes it was, only in the sense that they would look a bit more carefully perhaps—they would say, what is really being said here?

SUSAN: So, how does he ensure that these students are getting a fair chance?

HARRY: There was one that said “glows rather than flashes”... that's saying she's quiet, right?

SUSAN: Euphemisms.

HARRY: (Laughs) Euphemisms. I prefer the word ‘nuanced’ to euphemisms.

Ok here: “...A subtle, powerful presence in discussion.” So she discusses, but is subtle, and therefore perhaps is a little reserved...

SUSAN: These students are lucky—they have someone who understands what they have to offer and is willing to speak up on their behalf. It's no secret that getting into your dream school takes a lot more than good grades and high SAT scores. Many schools also look for student leaders, but of course, not everyone wants to be student body president. On this episode of *Quiet* we'll look at how to help your quiet teen navigate the college application process and get into the school that's right for her. Plus, we'll give practical tips to help your introvert adjust to campus life once she gets there. That's all ahead.

SUSAN: But first: why does Harry Dawe bring up a student's temperament at all? Over the years, he's found that not mentioning it can actually backfire if a quiet student doesn't shine during an admissions interview.

STEVE: What I've observed is that there is a kind of a predisposition in this process to reward those who really are more extroverted.

SUSAN: That's Steve LeMenager. He worked in the admissions office of Princeton University for 24 years and is now a college advisor for the educational consulting firm Edvice Princeton.

STEVE: There's a big pressure, I think, to do things like to be a leader, to put yourself out there, to captain a team, to be the head of some organization. And those aren't always the sorts of roles that fit neatly into all different types, as you say, temperament or personality.

JULIA: I think that the general trend is for introverts to kind of force themselves to sort of adopt certain personality traits that are very celebrated in leaders and associated with leadership.

SUSAN: Julia Perlmutter is an introvert and a Junior at Princeton University. She made a conscious decision to push herself in this area in the years leading up to college.

JULIA: One activity that I did in high school that was a little bit not in my nature was being on the debate team. I think that that was really good for me and not something I was totally comfortable with at the beginning, because it helped me make an argument without being overly concerned about being too aggressive or how what I said would impact the person with whom I was having the debate. So that was definitely a skill that I wanted to hone.

STEVE: I think there's something of a popular or conventional wisdom that, "Oh, you know, in order to move the needle, in order to differentiate oneself, one has to be out there and be the leader." I'm not sure that that's necessarily great advice because, as we know by observing humanity, there are so

many different types of learning styles and skill levels and temperaments that lead to and dovetail into an interesting mix of people in a community who learn from each other.

SUSAN: History is full of examples of reserved people who became powerful leaders because they felt so passionately about their cause. Take Gandhi. As a child he was so shy he used to run home from school every day after class so he didn't have to talk to his classmates.

The good news is, chasing after an extroverted ideal to land in a prestigious college may not be necessary—it could even take away from what makes a quiet student stand out.

STEVE: Given what I like to call the mythology of college admission, I think people who think about this process misperceive that you have to check those boxes. Okay, I have my leadership. I have my talent or ability. I have my community service. I'm strong academically. Therefore, I've checked all the boxes.

LISA: This is my life right now...

SUSAN: That's Lisa Kaenzig. You met her on our show about gifted introverts a couple of weeks ago.

LISA: Not only have I been a dean of 1st year students for 13 years, but I now have my introverted daughter who's a senior in high school looking at colleges and applying to colleges.

SUSAN: Lisa is Associate Dean at William Smith College in upstate New York.

LISA: I think we, as parents of prospective college students, are so focused on our kids being on all these different activities and sort of the over-scheduling problem that we've seen over and over again that we forget that it's really about our kid and what they want to do and where their passions lay and what their interests are regardless of whether they're introverted or extroverted.

SUSAN: As a mom, Lisa works to support her daughter's interests—which means that sometimes, she has to leave her dean's hat at the office.

LISA: We've been focused all along on following her and her interests and what she's interested in doing. And it's difficult as parents not to put our own value systems on those choices. I am not an artist, this was not where my calling was, but it is for my daughter so I found ways to be really supportive of her in her interests that are different from my own because I see her excitement and I want to make sure that I am helping her fulfill as much of her potential if she wants to and can. And there have been areas where I thought she was very talented and doing well but she wasn't enjoying it. You really have to watch and pay attention to your children that they're really doing things for themselves and not maybe to please you or a teacher or a coach or someone else in their life.

SUSAN: And, says Steve LeMenager, this may actually improve a quiet child's odds of making a positive impression on the admissions board.

STEVE: I think the happy part of this process is that there are human beings who are reading applications and trying to look at their decisions in a holistic way and making choices based on how that individual will fit into the whole array of things at the university, not just in terms of extracurricular activities.

SUSAN: Helping your child find his passion and setting up appropriate challenges along the way is exactly the right way to make your child stand out.

But equally important—and this cannot be stressed enough—is to find a college that will foster those interests. It's much better to find a school that fits the student than to try to mold the student to fit the institution. Here's Lisa Kaenzig again:

LISA: I was recently at a college and heard the dean of admission there give a wonderful definition of leadership. She said, 'We define leadership here as deep, long, committed

engagement in certain activities. We want to see that for 7, 8, 10 years, you've been really committed to the things that are important to you and that you can then tell us why those things have been important to you and we can see that you have moved up and done better and taken on more different kinds of roles, but being president or vice president, or secretary, or treasurer, or chair of something does not necessarily tell me that you've had deep and long engagement.' I was so happy to hear that because I think that's exactly what we should be helping our children do, find and make choices about the things they really care about.

SUSAN: Another area that can be challenging for introverts when applying to college is simply over-thinking it.

STEVE: A lot of the admission process is about self-reflection and who you are and what your role will be in society going forward, and how will you contribute. And my sense is that those who are more in the introverted side of things take that very seriously. And I think they're forced to make choices at a time when they're not quite ready to make those choices. And I think that stress level really can be palpable and somewhat destructive if there's not an opportunity for an outlet to get more sanity and a little bit more thoughtfulness and reflection about this process.

SUSAN: And as parents, we can unintentionally feed that stress. We need to be careful how early we start the march in preparing our kids for higher education.

STEVE: Their childhood is being shortened, and in some cases simply taken away. That sense of playfulness and learning about the world through interaction and through having the time to sit back and think about how this all works. When you're so scheduled and programmed, it's hard to reflect. And reflection is such an important part of human existence, in my view, that without as much of that, it's a pretty bad prescription for thoughtfulness and civility and sanity going forward.

SUSAN: So, while it's important to support your child as he prepares for college admissions, remind him that she has a lot of good options. And if your child doesn't get into his favorite school, it doesn't mean that his life is over. It is just the next step on his journey—one of many, many steps to come.

In a moment we're going to look at how to ease your Quiet child's transition from high school to the hectic new world of the college campus. But first a quick message from our sponsors.

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Podcast:

SUSAN: And we're back!

I'm Susan Cain and this is Quiet: The Power of Introverts. We've been talking about how to help quiet kids land in a college that's right for them. And now we're going to look at what happens once they get there.

LISA: I always say to students, it's like moving to another planet.

SUSAN: That's Lisa Kaenzig again. She's Associate Dean for first year students at William Smith College in upstate New York.

LISA: You know, here you are, you've probably either had your own room or some space at home that was your own. You come to college, you're living with two, three, four other people in a room or a suite. Very few college have lots of singles for first year students—that's very unusual. You have to really find a way to still find the places on that campus where you can have quiet time to recharge yourself, but it's often not the case.

JAKE: I love my roommates, they're from all over the world, and we get along great.

SUSAN: That's Jake Millman. He's a college freshman from New York who you met in our show about mastery.

JAKE: These are my noise-canceling headphones. I got them in college because I didn't realize that, 1) people, namely my roommates, listen to music out loud, and 2) people talk out loud and the walls are very thin in college, so I needed some solitude and some silence.

LISA: They go out to the lounge, the study space on their floor and kids are out there for all different reasons. Many of them to socialize and talk with other kids and get to know other people, which of course is what we also want them to do at college. But for the introvert, there is no space for them.

JAKE: I got the headphones, I use them to sleep or to study.

SUSAN: You sleep in your headphones?

JAKE: I do because otherwise I'd have to sleep to the sound of my roommates talking or playing music, which I can't—and they go to bed much later than I do.

LISA: I think it's on us as college educators to make sure that we're finding and making sure that we create those spaces to make sure that kids have that time to recharge and thinking hard about what it looks like to have an environment where both introverts and extroverts thrive. Because I think most colleges are committed and the reason for being there—the main intention of higher education—is that we want students to think deeply and critically and write great papers and have great projects and develop new ways of thinking about the problems of the world, but if we don't ever give them any space or time to do that, that makes it really tough.

SUSAN: Lisa is speaking here not only as a professional, but also as a parent.

LISA: As a parent of an introverted daughter who's a senior in high school and going off to college next year, I'm terrified. I'm terrified because I know so much as a Dean for 13 years of first-year student and I'm terrified because it's my first kid going

off to college. That's my tribe, those are my people so I really understand that. But what my advice would be to others, and what I'll try to remind myself of, is that I want her to find balance.

SUSAN: And, says Lisa, it turns out that this is such a fundamental part of her daughter's nature that she doesn't need to mention it.

LISA: Every school we've gone to she's wanted to go and look in the library and see where the spaces are in the library. I think it's not just because she's such a serious student who wants to do coursework all the time, because I know that's not true, but she's looking for those spaces in advance to college where she can find some time to regroup and recharge her batteries.

SUSAN: Princeton Junior Julia Perlmutter also factored in her temperament before deciding which college to attend.

JULIA: When I was applying to different colleges I pretty much was solely looking at small liberal arts colleges in rural areas. I thought that going to a smaller school would definitely suit my temperament in a lot of ways. I thought there would kind of be a naturally built-in, close-knit community, so that was very attractive to me.

SUSAN: There was only one larger school on her list.

JULIA: I ended up at Princeton instead, and I was definitely a little bit concerned coming in by the size of Princeton. Would I feel lost? But as it turns out, I think that a mid-sized school in kind of a small town is almost the ideal environment for an introvert, because you have access to a lot of smaller communities. I think it's also really nice how you can sort of maintain a sense of anonymity.

SUSAN: How do you know if your child is having a successful first year in college? Here are three things to look for: first, academic engagement. Does your child like her course work and her professors? Second, is he involved in things that are

important to him—whether that’s community service, music, sports, or what have you? And finally, has she found friends or people that have common interests? If the first two are falling into place, but he hasn’t found his people yet, tell him not to worry. He’s not alone.

LISA: It takes time for every student, but it really takes time for introverts because introverts tend to have just one or two really close friends that they take time to get to know.

They aren’t necessarily the kids they meet in those first few days at the orientation, what I kind of call friends of convenience, people that you needed to meet to be able to go to the dining hall with someone. They’ll get those, but it takes them longer to find friends that are going to be really deep, long-lasting friends and that’s okay. Very few students have all three going on in their first semester of college, it just takes some time.

SUSAN: And, says Julia, try not to get sucked into socializing that you’re not really up for.

JULIA: Many freshmen feel a lot of pressure at the beginning to always be surrounding themselves with people because everyone is super concerned about making friends, especially at the beginning and it’s important to remember that you will be able to develop meaningful relationships throughout college and not just at the very beginning. There isn’t a timeline on it. And that also your conversations with people will be better if you’re more energized, which can only happen if you make sure you have that time to yourself.

SUSAN: Meanwhile, back at Fieldston Day School, Harry Dawe waits for his next college hopeful to come knocking.

HARRY: I wonder where they are. I guess it’s lunchtime now for them...

SUSAN: This one, he says, is challenging for a reason common to introverts and extroverts alike...

HARRY: This student that's applying to colleges, they want to go where we know they're going to get into. That's hard! Because the ones that they can get into is sometimes the one they don't want to go to, right? They all want to go to the ones that are hard to get into.

And now it's time for some concrete tips:

SUSAN: But first, if you're an educator, I want to take a minute to invite you to join our Quiet Schools Network. At Quiet Revolution, we partner with schools and individual educators to train you as Quiet Ambassadors who can serve as experts in your school communities in introversion and extroversion and work with your colleagues to help tap into the power of quiet leadership. To get involved, just go to quietrev.com and search for Quiet Schools Network. We would love to connect with you!

Okay, and now for today's tips:

1. Your child does NOT need to be President of her class or Editor of the student paper in order to convince an admissions office that she has so-called leadership qualities! The key is to look for the thing that she truly loves to do, and go deep in that. When I was in high school, I became Editor of the school literary magazine and the school foreign language magazine. And let me tell you, the staff size of both magazines was really very small. So, from a straight up leadership point of view, these were not very stressful assignments, as compared to managing gigantic groups of students, which was great. But the real point was that I was doing work that I loved and that was consistent with the rest of my application, that talked about how I wanted to be a writer one day.
2. The most important factor in selecting the right college is finding the place where you can find your tribe. I think this matters

much more than school size or location. Culture is everything.

3. That said, anonymity can be a blessed thing, after the fishbowl nature of most high schools. So don't automatically assume that a large school is the wrong environment for an introvert. It might give him just the breathing room and excitement he needs to go forth and find his people—and his passions.

That's it for our show today.

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I'm Susan Cain. Thanks for listening!