What if the leaders your business really needs aren't the loudest voices in the room?

"My boss is moving on, but to replace him as Chief Technology Officer, I've been told I need to have more gravitas," begins David.

"So, what I'm looking for from a coach are some tips on gravitas."

While David's name has been changed, this exchange with coach Neil Munz-Jones is very real, and sadly, far from rare.

Within leadership, in many sectors including retail, trade and hospitality, there remains an unspoken belief that to succeed you need to tune into your extroverted self – assertive, charismatic, and, yes, possess that elusive gravitas. Leadership, in this mould, tends to be noisy.

But roughly half the population are introverts. And many are exceptional at leading, just differently.

Beyond the noise: what introverts bring

Yet many introverts find themselves stuck, trying to become something they're not.

"There's more than one way to lead," says Neil.

"One of the biggest misconceptions about introverts is that they can't be good leaders. But many successful companies, that consistently deliver great shareholder value, are run by leaders whose names we've never heard of."

Why? Because introverted leaders tend not to seek the spotlight. They promote their businesses and teams, not themselves. They want their actions to speak louder than their words.

Too often though, they're encouraged to 'fix' themselves: to imitate extroverted peers but whose louder, more dominant leadership style doesn't work for them.

"The trouble with trying to be someone you're not is that you feel awkward. You feel like an imposter because, in a way, that's what you become and everyone you're trying to lead can sense it. It's not a recipe for maximising your leadership impact or feeling good about it," says Neil.

The quiet strengths businesses need

Introverted leaders may lead more quietly, but they bring qualities that are sorely needed in people-driven and high-pressured sectors like retail and hospitality: deep listening, calm reflection, and inclusive problem solving.

“Introverted leaders make space for others, build strong teams, and make considered decisions in collaboration with others, all of which often leads to better outcomes,” says Neil.

And when businesses make space for this kind of leadership, the results speak for themselves:

- Teams feel heard.
- Credit is shared.
- Engagement and performance rise.

“It’s not about introvert vs extrovert. It’s about balance. Right now, there’s a leadership imbalance. It’s about making space for both styles,” says Neil.

Coaching and consulting: a broader way to support change

Neil and the team at mdj2 have spent over two decades helping major brands in retail, trade and hospitality lead change. But time and again, it has become clear that lasting change relies heavily on the individual leading it.

That insight led Neil to deepen his work with leaders by expanding his role as a consultant to also become a professional coach. As an introvert himself, his speciality is coaching introverted leaders and ‘helping them find their voice’.

From becoming the Managing Director of a manufacturing firm at a young age, to holding director-level roles in corporates, and now leading his own business, Neil understands the pressure to lead in ways that don’t feel natural. He knows it’s not the way forward for him or many other introverted leaders.

“I even wrote a book about one critical aspect of leadership for introverts: networking. I wrote *The Reluctant Networker* not because I’m great at networking, but because, like everything an introverted leader must do, I had to find a way that worked for me,” says Neil.

“When I set up my own business, I had to network. There was no choice. Twenty years on, I don’t go to networking events, yet all my work still comes through networking. That’s because I found a different way to do it. One that feels more authentic and works for me,” says Neil.

Leadership, like networking, isn’t one-size-fits-all. And introverts don’t need to lead like extroverts to succeed. But they do need support to find their true leadership style.

A journey worth taking

Neil believes coaching is a particularly powerful way for introverted leaders to do that.

“It provides a quiet space where introverts can slow down, reflect, and grow on their own terms, at their own pace,” he says.

As a coach, Neil takes introverted leaders through a journey of three stages:

- **Self-awareness**: understanding your strengths, limits, and ways of working.

- **Self-acceptance**: letting go of who you think you 'should' be and accepting and valuing who you are.
- **Growth**: becoming a fuller, better, version of yourself, rather than trying to become a different person.

And for David, that journey paid off.

He never got those gravitas tips. But after coaching with Neil, he embraced his own leadership style and secured the promotion to Chief Technology Officer.

Six months in, he shared feedback from the board: they valued his collaborative approach and that he was a safe pair of hands.

"He stopped trying to emulate his super-charismatic predecessor," Neil recalls, "and relaxed into leading in a quieter way that was true to him."

A final question

So, given a good coach perfects the art of questioning, what does Neil believe more businesses would benefit from asking more often?

"Who might we be overlooking?"

Not because they can't lead, but because they haven't yet found or embraced their own quiet, powerful leadership style.

Neil Munz-Jones is a coach, consultant and connector. He brings together over two decades of experience through mdj2, the business he founded. Mdj2 supports lasting growth in retail, trade, and hospitality by developing both people and the projects they lead. He shares these coaching experiences in support of International Coaching Week.

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