

## **The Design Untangled Podcast**

### **Episode: DU037 – The Design of Introverts**

**Host: Chris Mears and Carla Lindarte**

**Duration: 27:25 minutes**

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(00:16) **Chris:** Hello and welcome to Design Untangled with me Chris Mears and Carla Lindarte. Hello.

(00:22) **Carla:** Hello Chris, how are you doing?

(00:24) **Chris:** Yes, good. Had a deep tissue massage yesterday with this big northern bloke and he basically just punched the knots until they went away. So I am feeling a bit fragile today.

(00:36) **Carla:** Oh wow. That sounds painful.

(00:40) **Chris:** But I have got some knots in my back, they have been there probably like 25 years. So they needed to get punching.

(00:46) **Carla:** I do not know if sometimes it is better, or worse to have a message like that. When I have massages, I normally say can you just do it not too strong, because then otherwise I am sore afterwards, but anyway. Maybe you just need a number of them, right?

(01:01) **Chris:** Yes, I think the soreness is a sign that it is actually done some good. So I do not like having massages where it is just like someone tickling you for an hour. While, I do like that. But then afterwards you are like, what was the point, because you still cannot walk properly.

(01:17) **Carla:** We have very cheap or free massages at work. And every time you go, they ask you what type of massage you want. And whether you want it with a lot of

pressure or less pressure, so you can try different things. So that is a really good Google pack.

(01:35) **Chris:** Is it just sitting in a chair or full on?

(01:38) **Carla:** No, it is a proper one, it looks like a spa. It even has the music, and they are professional people who are there. They normally are booked out, and they have it in all the Google offices, so it is really cool. I love massages and getting them all the time.

(01:56) **Chris:** So it is not just some developers in a room with some wow music giving massages?

(02:00) **Carla:** No, no, no. They also have chair massages in the same place. But yes, they are proper massages and they are heavily subsidized, so quite cheap.

(02:11) **Chris:** Oh, that is pretty good. I used an app, which I would not name drop it, but it is like Uber. So you just say, I want a massage and book someone, they show up, which was pretty cool.

(02:23) **Carla:** That is really good. How long did you have to wait?

(02:26) **Chris:** Well, I had appointments within half an hour or something. So we are not talking about massages today. That has been twenty percent of the show, just talking about that. We are talking about introverts. Now, would you say that you are an introvert or an extrovert?

(02:46) **Carla:** I am definitely an introvert.

(02:49) **Chris:** You reckon?

(02:49) **Carla:** Yes, definitely. It is funny, because a lot of people would say, people who I know, would say that I am not an introvert, but I actually am, I think like an introvert. I have to work really hard to be outgoing and before I speak or say something in a meeting, I get really nervous. I would prefer when I am on my own. Growing up as well, I was always reading books and not being really sociable. I really hate to be popular.

(03:27) **Chris:** Such a grind, is it not?

(03:27) **Carla:** Oh god, it is so frightful. Whereas my brother, for example, he was so outgoing and funny. And actually, I love hanging out with extroverts, because I do not have to worry about saying much. It is less stressful, because they can just run the show.

(03:50) **Chris:** Yes, exactly. I guess a good place to start is just to describe the basic difference. So there is obviously different flavors of introverts and extroverts. It seems to be the most common definition of an introvert is someone that kind of recharges their batteries from being alone. Whereas an extrovert likes the opposite, they need stimulation and social contact to feel energized. So that is why you get the typical sort of scenes of the introvert, sat with a book or whatever at home, and the extroverts giving messages to everyone at parties. They do not even give a shit. Yes, that seems to be the most common definition. And then there is kind of sub bits to it, like you say, introverts tend to prefer thinking before they speak, potentially. They like focusing on one thing really deeply rather than jumping around.

(04:44) **Carla:** Yes. And I guess you could jump between one or the other sometimes, as some people could do that. Could be for example, in some parts of their lives they could be more of an introvert and then maybe jumping to be an extrovert as well.

(05:04) **Chris:** Yes, I definitely think it is quite fluid.

(05:07) **Carla:** I guess people might be wondering why this is relevant for a designer?

(05:14) **Chris:** That is a good question. Why is most of this episode being relevant to the designer? Well, I think there is a couple of reasons. So design thinking and design processes, they all involve essentially, a lot of people interaction, because you are designing for people, and you have to sell your ideas to people as well. So it can be quite challenging. I think if you are an introvert to deliver UX, and research, and design, because a lot of the expectation is that you are going to be out standing in front of groups of people and schpeel off a big presentation about why you have done certain designs. Or if you are in the research realm, you are actually going to have to talk people. And if that is in a group kind of research scenario, that might be quite overwhelming potentially.

So it is a topic I wanted to talk about because I think, I do not know, this is just anecdotal, but it does seem like a lot of UX people do tend to be introverts, from just my own experience.

(06:17) **Carla:** Yes, that is true. It is also challenging when you are an introvert, especially in the design world where you have to be a bit of a consultant as well, and selling an idea, and give a recommendation. And obviously, confidence does not necessarily relate directly with being an introvert and an extrovert. But if you are not comfortable with those kind of situations, it makes it really, really hard. And I can tell you from my own experience. I was also thinking that, at the same time, the positives about that is when you start managing people, for example when you are an introvert, you are more likely to try to avoid the center of attention. Which is good sometimes, if you are managing people, because it means that you create that environment for them to actually take ownership of the work, and going, and presenting, and then you basically facilitate that process. I am guilty, if that is a guilt, but I am guilty of that. When I was working before in the consultancy world and used to manage people, I actually was very happy working in a team, because I could one on one, provide direction and one on one in more of environment where I do not have to be the center of attention. I could do all of that, but then allow my team to actually go and do the presenting and then I could feel safer, if that makes sense. So it is, it is also a positive. And it is been demonstrated that, introverts turn out to be better managers than extroverts because they do not want to take the credit.

(08:05) **Chris:** And I think, yes, there are lots of quite famous introverts who have been pretty successful, like Bill Gates, one of them, Einstein, Rosa Parks, Warren Buffet, he is a famous investor if you have not heard of him, the most famous investor. So it is not because you are an introvert, you can be super successful and run a company, massive companies with thousands of people. There are ways to do it in your own style, I think. Some of the issues that came up, it struck me, were quite similar to what you were talking about in your last episode. Where a lot of the problems women seem to have and underrepresented groups, actually, in some setting, seems to be similar to introverts. Like people talking over the top of them, or being ignored, or that sort of stuff, I found that quite interesting.

(08:57) **Carla:** Yes, definitely. And that is what I was saying before, it all depends on the situation as well. How comfortable you are with a team or your own environment? You could be more of an introvert than an extrovert. But definitely your lack of confidence. So, there are certain environments, I actually experienced that myself, before I joined Google, I was super confident and knew exactly what I was doing. I could get into a meeting and just say what I thought. When I started at Google it was really hard, difficult company, lots of very smart people and also had a learning curve, learning, about marketing and data, et cetera. And I went back, fell back into my introvert self. And I was really shy, not saying much, hiding a little bit from the situation, because I was not comfortable. And I think yes, and related to what these people were saying in the previous episode, finding those environments when you feel more confident about yourself. And repeating why you are good at something, and thinking that you are there, because they want you to be there. You have something to say, is something that you have to keep working throughout your life, even if you think you have already mastered it. Any situation can change and you can land in an environment where you do not feel as comfortable, so you have to keep working on it.

(10:32) **Chris:** Yes, exactly. And I think the environment thing is quite key, because a lot of places, is an open plan now, which is not ideal introvert territory, typically. So if you do need to kind of regroup your thoughts, luckily, a lot of places have little breakout areas or you can grab a coffee, whatever it is. The important thing, I think is to feel comfortable in your environment and that will allow you to think more clearly. And one of the traits of introverts is they do like to think about problems before speaking a lot of the time. So if that is something you need to do to do your work effectively, then do that. If you have got a manager, you need to tell them that is how you need to work. Presumably, they are there to support you most of the time, or just do things in smaller groups as well as another tactic. So a lot of introverts will be more comfortable with groups of one or two people potentially. So see if there is ways you can work in that kind of format.

(11:34) **Carla:** And I guess it is like a muscle as well. You can actually train yourself to expose yourself a little bit more and slowly find the environments where you are more comfortable to do it. So you just want to test some of the ideas you come up with, go to smaller group. Or maybe if you want to do a design review, or get feedback from a

number of people, then you invite a few people from other teams to get feedback from them and have conversation. So slowly kind of trying to train yourself and put yourself in those situations as well. Because unfortunately, this world, and you might say great with me, but this world kind of promotes extrovert behavior. It is like you would not get a promotion in a big company unless you really shout about it. And it does not mean you need to become annoying all the time, but you do need to talk about yourself. You need to be kept comfortable going and having that difficult conversation. You need to force yourself into those situations, especially, now there is an expectation that designers, and in other professions as well, you need to put this out there and talk, do keynotes and stuff like that. And so you need to find what is suitable for you. I actually think that, for example, this podcast for me, it has helped me a lot. Because I kind of do not think anyone, apart from you, is listening to me, and I do not really want to chat with you.

(13:12) **Chris:** I only really half listen any way.

(13:12) **Carla:** Yes, you never listen anyway. It is something you can create. You can do your own podcast. It is finding ways where you can create more of these behaviors, because unfortunately, this society kind of pushes you to be like that.

(13:31) **Chris:** It is a bit weird actually. Do you remember when we were doing the first episodes of this and we just had to get ourselves drunk to get free? And it was still super boring?

(13:41) **Carla:** We are still boring.

(13:41) **Chris:** Now we talked to thousands, still boring, but someone is listening for some reason. Now we talk to basically thousands of listeners. So not really an issue to just go and chat to people on all the different interviews we have done. So yes, I would not say that I am a complete introvert, but I probably lean that way. So the two introverts put out podcasts that it is going out to thousands of people. It is just practicing that muscle, like you say, and it is not really a big deal now. Completely sober, well partially sober.

(14:21) **Carla:** Another angle that I thought about in terms of introverts is, when you either running a workshop or running an ideation session with your team, or trying to

come up ideas, trying to get people to come up with ideas in a group environment. It is normally that the idea of the loudest person in the room or the boss, sometimes, is the one that everyone agrees with, because introverts are not necessarily comfortable with putting their ideas forward, if they find lots of extroverts around them. I just said it at the beginning, I actually love having extroverts around, because it means I do not have to make any effort. But if you think about, if you are in a workshop and you facilitate in a workshop, the things like the crazy eggs, for example, encourage individual thinking first and writing lots ideas for example, and then presenting your ideas to the group. So it is still encouraging individual thinking. And recently I tested, I used brain writing. And I do not know if you have used that in the past. It is actually a very good technique to get, in a very silent way. It is actually very quiet. So it is a way of brainstorming, that allows everyone to put the ideas forward. So you basically take a piece of paper, and you can Google it, it is everywhere, brain writing. You basically take a piece of paper and divide the piece of paper into the number of participants you basically have in your team, in your groups. And then people can come up with one, or up to three or four ideas, you can customize it. And the idea of that is, that people have say five minutes to write down two or three ideas, and then they pass it over to the next person on the right, once they are done, and that person then reads these ideas and has more space to write down either a new idea, inspired by the other person's idea, or just complimenting or improving the idea they just wrote. It sounds more complicated than it is. I am making it sound more complicated than it is, but it is actually a very, very good way. I actually got really good feedback, because everyone can input their ideas, and at the end, what you do is, whoever has got the piece of paper, needs to decide which are the best ideas, and then do an open discussion about it. So it means that, if you are an introvert, and you really want to communicate your idea, then you have time to write it down and then you obviously have the possibility of getting your idea to be considered, in that group environment. So that is a very, very good technique. I really recommend it.

(17:19) **Chris:** Cool. I think as a facilitator as well, and introvert facilitator, there is value in doing those exercises towards the start of the workshop, where it is a bit more kind of quiet individual time because it allows you to warm up to the crowd a little bit, I suppose, without just jumping in straight to a massive open discussion, which can be quite challenging. And those warm up exercises as well, although there occasionally bit

cheesy, they are another way to just familiarize yourself with the group. And I think once you are over that initial barrier, it is not quite as bad as just when you are going into the complete unknown, you do not know anyone in there. You have never said a word to them, it can be quite stressful I think. So yes, there are definitely ways you can warm up yourself into the workshop as well as the participants.

(18:12) **Carla:** Yes, definitely. And also being an introvert and having to run a lot of workshops. For me, the best thing is just to have a very, very clear view of everything you are saying, and what you are doing to the point. I get very detailed, but just make sure that you always know what activities you are going through. What timings do you have, what are you going to ask people to do, in a lot of detail, so then you never feel uncomfortable and obviously if things change that is fine. But you always have an idea of what is next. There has been situations in the past when I have run workshops with not much preparation, and then you get really stressed about what is next. What if people do not like this? And then you get yourself really stressed about it. Because I do not have this magic improvisation skill, I need to make sure that I know exactly what I am doing. And I really recommend to do that, if you are planning a workshop.

(19:14) **Chris:** So what about public speaking? So it is all the rage these days, and there is definitely a big camp of people that think everyone should do it. I have done it. To be honest, I do not really find it that intimidating, for some reason, which is a bit weird. But lots of people obviously do, I think it is the biggest phobia people, have after death or something. So someone I worked with had quite a funny comment. They identify as a complete introvert, but it is like what you were saying, it is fine because the audience cannot talk back to you, so you do not have to make conversation. So that is a good point.

(19:57) **Chris:** Have you dropped your phone again?

(19:59) **Carla:** Aaah, no.

(20:03) **Chris:** Every fucking time, Jesus. Yes., so public speaking as an introvert, I think like anything, you are going be nervous beforehand and you may never shake that. But bear in mind all the stuff we have talked about before, people were there because

they want to hear what you have to say. And if you have prepared what you want to say enough, you know it like the back of your hands, it is going to be fine. I think as long as you are talking about something you are passionate about, which is always the best kind of thing to talk about, like us with massages at the start.

(20:35) **Carla:** Yes, definitely. Again, everything else that is a muscle, I absolutely hate public speaking. I think everyone thinks how stupid and ridiculous my accent is. And everyone is going to be looking at the way I look, and I get super distracted when I am doing any kind of public speaking, and then start getting super nervous. But to be honest, the best thing to do is just to practice. I know it is contradictory to an introvert behavior, but if you find opportunities to put yourself out there and just give it a go, just do it. Because that is the only way you are going to get better. There is actually a really, really good book. I always recommend a book. It is called, "*How to own the Room*". Actually, the author, was at Google a few weeks ago, just to do a keynote about public speaking and it was it is amazing. I also recommend the podcast. Her podcast is really great. It is highly targeted to women, but it could be for everyone else. And she gives you very, very practical techniques and things that you could do to improve your public speaking. But the best advice is to just have to do it. You have no more options than, put yourself out there and do it, and do it, and do it again. And the more you do it, the better you are going to get at it.

(22:15) **Chris:** Yes. So, the other book to recommend, I have one for once, and it is, "*Quiet*" by Susan Cain, which kind of spun off the idea for this podcast. And I know it is resonated with quite a lot of people that I have spoken to. And there was an interesting bit in there about this parent and her kids, and she was sending her kids to all these classes and stuff. And she was basically just playing up and coming home miserable. And rather than kind of seeing her as just being shy and why are not you mingling with all your friends, in all these activities? She recognized her kid as an introvert, and then that reframes kind of the behavior, in that she needed time to wind down and regain that energy after the activities. So by actually cutting down the amount of stuff she did, her behavior improved quite a lot. So yes, it is that whole kind of extroverted society thing we were talking about. The perception is, if you are not doing loads of things, loads of activities, loads of classes, there is something wrong with you. But you might still enjoy

those classes, but you just need to do them in your own way, and you need time to recover after them, and that sort of stuff.

(23:34) **Carla:** Yes, that is really good. By all means, I do not think we are saying that you should stop collaboration. It is more, if you feel more comfortable coming up with ideas on your own, do it. And then bring it back to the team, and do not feel that you always have to put yourself in uncomfortable situations. You always need to be brainstorming. You always need to be collaborating. You can always have your own space and then being able to work in the way that is more comfortable for you.

(24:14) **Chris:** Yes, absolutely. Should we do a cheesy internet quiz?

(24:18) **Carla:** Okay.

(24:20) **Chris:** So are you more of an introvert or extrovert? It sounds like you already know the answer to this. After attending a large party or networking event, how do you feel? Tired and drained, even if I had fun, or energized and ready for more?

(24:33) **Carla:** I hate networking, so very drained.

(24:39) **Chris:** Energized.

(24:39) **Carla:** No, no no. I really hate networking.

(24:42) **Chris:** **[inaudible 24:42]** So you have just met someone new. How would they describe you? Quiet, reserved and calm or outgoing, talkative and friendly?

(24:49) **Carla:** I would say, I do not know. That is a funny one. I would say quiet and reserved, but I have been told different things, so I am not sure. Maybe some ways, it is my perception, but some might be other people's perception, but I think could be more quite and reserved.

(25:09) **Chris:** I am going to override that because I have met you as a new person once upon a time, and I would say outgoing, talkative and friendly. So I would go with my answer.

(25:19) **Carla:** You see? Okay.

(25:21) **Chris:** You need to vent about your day at work. What do you do? Call someone or text someone.

(25:26) **Carla:** Text someone.

(25:27) **Chris:** I do not know if that is fair, everyone texts everyone now, no nobody calls. You find yourself at home alone for the afternoon. What is your reaction? Restless, you call up a friend to chat or **[inaudible 25:39]** you finally got few hours to yourself?

(25:42) **Carla:** I love being on my own and have a few hours to myself.

(25:46) **Chris:** When it comes to small talk, do you dive in? I can always think of things to talk about, or hesitate, it does not come naturally.

(25:54) **Carla:** I hate that, especially if it is in English.

(25:57) **Chris:** But you are alright in Spanish?

(25:59) **Carla:** I am alright in Spanish and with Colombians. But with the English people or in a foreign environments, I struggle.

(26:09) **Chris:** Right. You are more of an introvert.

(26:14) **Carla:** Oohh.

(26:14) **Chris:** That was worth the wait, was it not? Well, there we go, bomb shelter and...

(26:20) **Carla:** What did you have as a result?

(26:20) **Chris:** Oh yes, the same.

(26:21) **Carla:** You see, I would not think you are an introvert.

(26:24) **Chris:** Yes. Well I think it depends. Like I said, I probably am more in general, in some situations when I just do not give a shit. Alright, so I think that is all we have got. If you are an introvert, just do things in the way that make you comfortable. There are techniques and tricks that we have hopefully shared today, that will help you be able to

work collaboratively without getting too stressed out about it. There are ways for you to succeed in an extrovert world. And extroverts are alright as well, so you can work with them if you want to.

(27:00) **Carla:** Yes, they are very handy.

(27:01) **Chris:** Very, very handy. Alright. Bye.

(27:06) **Carla:** Bye, see you next time.

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