



## Episode 6: Is Your Child Quietly Gifted?

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### Podcast:

SUSAN: This is *Quiet: The Power of Introverts*. I'm Susan Cain

SCOTT: I know more introverted artists than extroverted, especially musicians. My name is Scott Mayo. I'm a musician here in Los Angeles. I play woodwinds, so I play saxophones, clarinets, and flutes.

SUSAN: Scott is a Grammy Award-winning musician. He's a featured artist on the Sergio Mendes tour and he's also played with Bruce Springsteen, Mick Jagger and Earth, Wind & Fire. His day job is arranging music and performing on *Dancing With The Stars*.

SCOTT: I was so obsessed with music even at a young age that I would just come home and start making noise to myself—I thought it was to myself, but then my mother would tell me to stop. I didn't realize that I'd be making beat sounds in my mouth and singing. Then

when I started on clarinet, I would just come home and start playing my clarinet. I'd be watching cartoons and playing my clarinet.

SUSAN: Scott's talent for music was an anomaly in his family.

SCOTT: I come from a very athletic family. I was the weird one because I was musical. I felt like there was something wrong with me, so I figured, "Well, I'll just be a jock like everybody else."

SUSAN: So it wasn't immediately clear how musically gifted Scott was. But there often *is* a strong connection between introversion and giftedness:

LISA: About 75% of gifted and talented individuals are introverted or even perhaps ambiverted, sort of in the middle. That's very different from the general population and so we started looking at that.

SUSAN: That's Dr. Lisa Kaenzig. She coauthored the study "[Introversion: The Often Forgotten Factor Impacting the Gifted](#)" and she's a frequent lecturer on gifted and introverted learners. On this episode of Quiet we're going to explore the connection between introversion and giftedness, and show you how to spot the quietly gifted kids in your life. We'll also hear how Scott Mayo's experience growing up as a gifted introvert helped him support and challenge his own gifted child to unlock his exceptional talent.

That's all ahead. But first, what do we mean when we say someone is gifted? Lisa Kaenzig explains.

LISA: The key characteristics of gifted and talented individuals are that they have deep interests, often very narrow-focused. The ability to focus for long periods of time, deep curiosity, extraordinary intellectual engagement and a real interest in following that all the way through as far as they can and then often, they are most creative thinkers. They are the people who are also coming up with new ideas.

SUSAN: Sound familiar? These are also the key traits of introverts, which is why there seems to be so much overlap in the gifted and talented population.

But does that mean that introverts are “smarter” than extroverts? No. Measuring intelligence is notoriously difficult. Part of the problem is an over-reliance on IQ tests which measures only one kind of intelligence and can miss exceptional kids whose overall IQ score is less than the magical 130 point cut off.

SCOTT: I don't view IQ as all there is to intelligence, I'd be the last person in the world to say that.

SUSAN: That's cognitive psychologist Dr. Scott Barry Kaufman, most recently the author of “Wired to Create.”

SCOTT: There is research suggesting that at that a really high level of intelligence there's something there in terms of a prominent level of sensitivity, a prominent level of introversion that does seem to be a very common characteristic of these just hugely imaginative and intelligent young children.

MARGOT: I'm Margo and I'm 9 years old. I like to play with my toys and I like to read. Last year I read the Laura Ingalls Wilder books. They're good! This year I'm reading all the American Girl books that I won.

LARA: She was asking me very profound and existential questions when she was literally two years old.

SUSAN: That's Lara, Margot's mom.

LARA: I remember telling my husband when—I think she was two when she asked me where the first people came from—that she was incredibly smart.

SUSAN: Even though Margot tested extremely high on her cognitive exams...

LARA: Like off the charts.

SUSAN: ...her teachers were slow to recognize her gifts.

LARA: Every year there would be a learning curve with her teachers because she's retiring, she's not the kid who's throwing herself out there in the front of the class. She is sort of just moving through at her own pace and direction, and not needing any kind of special attention or anything. So it took a couple of them until the end of the year to really understand how gifted she is and that kind of bothered me.

SUSAN: And says Lisa Kaenzig, unfortunately that is all too common with quietly gifted kids.

LISA: Many introverted students will appear to teachers—often teachers who are extroverted—as perhaps disinterested or checked out or not paying attention. In fact it's just that the inside of their mind is so active and engaged that there is not that same external appearance that you would see in an extroverted child who is much more animated in their facial expressions, often using their hands to talk and really engage in terms of their body language. It's a very different look in a classroom.

SUSAN: For years, educators measured giftedness very narrowly and many brilliant young children fell through the cracks.

SCOTT: I think a large cross-section of kids were missing in gifted and talented programs are those whose intellectual and creative gifts are not as visible in a classroom.

SUSAN: That's Scott Barry Kaufman again. He knows, because it happened to him.

SCOTT: I had a learning disability growing up and I had this rich fantasy world. I would go home and I would write stories in my room alone, I would act out soap opera plot lines in my head. It would be like "to be continued tomorrow" just like a soap opera. Even some of my dreams were "to be continued." It was weird. I just had this rich inner stream of consciousness that no one took the trouble to see because all they're looking at were more of these superficial kind of visible indicators in a classroom situation, like are you paying attention? Are you exerting self-control? Self-control is a very big buzzword in education right now.

SUSAN: In fact, many gifted children are constantly in motion—talking, exploring, and asking lots of questions. This behavior is often misread as ADHD or some other learning disability. Luckily, says Dr. Lisa Kaenzig, that narrow view of giftedness is changing.

LISA: One of the best things I think that's happened in gifted and talented identification in this last 20 years is when we moved away from just IQ tests or various test of cognitive intellectual ability to more parent-teacher checklist. Looking at children and watching focus, attention, time on task. The interest in getting into a topic and being able to go for a long time. And I think that's really helped in terms of broadening our identification of gifted and talented students from a variety of socioeconomic, racial, ethnic backgrounds. I think that's been all to the good.

SCOTT: What I've been personally trying to do is to show the value of the person's inner daydreams, the person's inner fantasies, strivings. At the end of the day in terms of the giftedness research, that would be what I really want more of. Giving all kids more of a chance to display their brilliance.

MARGOT: This is Emma. This is Ella and this is Trixie. Trixie is a girl who likes to run around and play even if she's not supposed to. She likes to break rules and stand up for what she thinks is right. I have other ones of these. So, I was this one and my friend was another one and we pretend that they were at the playground and they were swept into a portal and they had to find their way back somehow.

SUSAN: One of the best indicators of whether or not your child is gifted is you. And while every child is different, there are some qualities that tend to come up more frequently. So ask yourself, does my child think learning is fun? Does she enjoy complexity? Can he focus on a problem for a very long time with little direction? Does she have an excellent memory, a high degree of empathy, and a deep appreciation of natural beauty and art?

These are just a few of the more common signs. You can read about other clues to look out for on our website at [Quietrev.com](http://Quietrev.com).

If you suspect that your quiet child is gifted, get her tested at school. The best time to do that is before she turns 9. According to the Gifted Development Center, it's around that age that kids start to develop what are called "masking behaviors" like hiding their abilities so they don't stand out among their peers.

If your child is gifted, and this is so important—make sure she is in an environment that is intellectually stimulating. Here's Margot's mom Lara again.

LARA: I was at their school a lot and every time I'd go by her classroom I'd see her just sort of staring out in space and not engaged which isn't to say that she didn't like school and she wasn't happy to go there, but she was bored and she felt under-challenged.

SUSAN: Musician Scott Mayo remembers feeling the same way when he was younger.

SCOTT: I was pretty bright academically and things were not real challenging to me. I think a lot of gifted kids, there are four and five and six things going on in their mind at the same time. The challenge for teachers is that they're just talking about one thing. They don't recognize that these gifted kids are bored because they have five other things going on in their own mind and you need to give them something really challenging to engage them or you're just going to lose them and that's what happens. That's what happened to me a lot, too. You just started to lose me after a certain amount of years because I was bored.

SUSAN: This isn't always a teacher's fault. A quietly gifted child may choose not to raise her hand to answer a question in class because they don't want to draw attention to themselves. This can make their gifts really hard for a teacher to detect. As a parent, you need to advocate for your quiet child to make sure that they are getting the kind of input and feedback and stimulation that they need in the classroom environment.

Lara recently moved Margot into a new school with a gifted program...

MARGOT: It's different.

LARA: It's kind of a unique situation because she was with the same group of children for so long which is actually ideal for a kid like her. It was a really hard decision to think about moving her.

SUSAN: It's true. Quietly gifted children are often really sensitive and it often takes them longer to form tight bonds with their peers. Choosing between deep emotional connections and intellectual stimulation can be excruciating.

You may decide to keep your child in a general education classroom and challenge him with extracurricular activities on the side that are geared toward his interests. There is no right or wrong answer here as long as you are making room for appropriate challenges.

While it's still too early say how Margot's new school will work out, Lara thinks the trade off will be worth it. For now she's scheduling plenty of playdates with Margot's closest friends to help smooth the transition.

SUSAN: Whether your gifted introvert is in an accelerated program or not, there is still a lot you can do to help her reach her full potential. A big part of that is understanding and working with what we already know about how introverts learn.

SCOTT: Parents should recognize the importance for these children of the flow experience.

The flow experience is this concept that we study in positive psychology, which is the state of complete absorption in what you're doing. Complete, rapt attention, I guess you could say. It feels effortless, it feels like time recedes in the background, and you're kind of just one with the activity. A key thing for increasing the flow state is well-matching the activity to the student's level of ability.

SUSAN: Flow – losing yourself in an activity – gives these gifted learners the chance to dig into their unique abilities. When we return, we're going to hear how musician Scott Mayo used what he knew about flow to help guide his son Michael's musical development, and

we'll share tips on how to balance your gifted introvert's craving for intellectual stimulation with their quiet nature. But first, this message from our sponsor.

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Podcast:

SUSAN: This is *Quiet: The Power of Introverts*. I'm Susan Cain, and today we're talking about how to help your gifted introvert thrive.

MICHAEL: My name is Michael Mayo and I am a singer. I sing jazz and I'm currently a student at the Thelonious Monk Institute of jazz in Los Angeles. I knew that I wanted to be in music probably from the age of two or three. It's always been really clear to me that music was the thing that I wanted to do.

SCOTT: It's funny actually, what we need to do is go back.

SUSAN: That's Michael's dad again, Scott Mayo.

SCOTT: I'll tell you what I did. I created a CD of all the music that I liked. It was John Coltrane, Duke Ellington, Stravinsky, Bach, Brahms, James Brown, Earth, Wind & Fire... Everybody. I'd put headphones on her stomach and I would play it on her stomach. I was just determined that he was going to be a musician. I figured if I

would put music in him from the time he was conceived that he would come out being musical, and he did.

His mother is also a professional singer. She's not just good. She's amazing. This is what he was listening to for nine months. He was listening to her voice sing, and he was listening to me play, so he kind of had no choice. Her water broke in the studio. He was almost literally born in the studio (laughs).

Michael: If you ask my parents they'll tell you I've been singing since I was a couple of months old.

Scott: Early on, like three months, she sang a note to him and he sang it back. We could not believe that a three-month-old child could do that, so she sang a different note to him and he sang it back. It started from there that he was able to make this connection between his ear and his voice that most people don't do for years. It was amazing.

SUSAN: As he got a little older, his temperament also became clear.

SCOTT: We'd be watching the Aladdin movie and he knew every song before it came on and he would always sing it in the right key while also playing with a toy and seemingly being quiet and not paying attention. I could always see that his mind was very active, but he would keep to himself a lot of times, he'd be singing softly. I remember one time when he started playing basketball, he'd be out there in the middle of the court just singing to himself. Instead of playing basketball, he was standing there singing. It was hilarious.

SUSAN: Scott knows how important alone time is for him as an introverted musician and he's made sure Michael has space for his own contemplation and experimentation.

SCOTT: He's definitely been one who spends more alone time just thinking and considering and working things out. More so than social time. I don't think he draws his energy from being around people. He's very comfortable being around people, but I think that he is a person who kind of connects with himself and spends time with himself in order to figure out what his next move is.

SUSAN: That, says Lisa Kaenzig, can be critical to a gifted young introvert's success.

LISA: Introverted people, children, certainly, this is true, need a lot of time to recharge on their own. They prefer to work by themselves or in very small groups of people that they already know well. It's very important that their teacher or the parent creates an environment that feels safe for that student. One of the hallmark characteristics of introverts is that they don't like to take big risks in front of other people. They're taking them in their own minds all of the time.

SCOTT: We never had to force him to practice. We never had to force him to do any of that stuff. He was always bringing stuff to us. It was really great to see that he had that drive because there's so many gifted people but they don't have the drive or the discipline, and he has both. I knew early on that it was something that he wanted to do because he was the one that was bringing it to us. We weren't forcing it on him.

SUSAN: Every parent hopes their child will find something that drives them, but Scott had the advantage of having been a gifted introverted child himself. That helped him understand his son's temperament and what he needed to grow. He knew that Michael needed to be challenged academically, so he switched him to a gifted program - but it still took Michael time to find his place.

MICHAEL: My first grade year and my second grade year I wasn't in the magnet. And then, my third grade year they put me into it. So, I was in the class with kids who had been in the magnet since first grade so they were already used to it, and by the time I got there I was like, "Oh man, this is real life, this is what people are doing." They're all working really hard and they all are very, very smart. It was a little bit intimidating at first.

SUSAN: That changed when Michael attended the LA County High School for the Arts.

SCOTT: It was really there that he began to take off, really artistically take off where it was no longer... He wasn't our child. He was his own artist.

SUSAN: An artist whose talent continues to mature. In 2013, Michael was invited to participate at the American Voices Festival at the Kennedy Center.

SCOTT: He was among a very select group of young singers that was chosen to sing for Diane Reeves and for all these really famous singers of different genres.

MICHAEL: The artist that they chose to be represented for the jazz category was Diane Reeves who is an amazing, amazing jazz singer. I sang the song "It Could Happen To You," and I improvised a scat solo and as I was doing that, Diane went to her pianist and started telling him to change a couple of the chords just to see if I was really hearing it. He changed a couple of the chords and I really tried to get into the harmony, then she came over and grabbed the microphone and started singing with me.

That was such an honor to be able to sing with her because I've admired her for such a long time.

DIANE: Jazz on stage is alive as you know. But it's also a very intimate exchange between everybody that's onstage. You have to listen so you can respond and keep the conversation going. You do that so impeccably well!

SUSAN: Of course, not every gifted child will end up wowing a jazz legend, but nurturing our children's gifts allows them the chance to succeed in their own way.

And now it's that time on the show when I give you concrete tips on how to help your quietly gifted child thrive.

SUSAN: But first: 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. You'll also have the chance to interact with other parents of quiet kids. To check out the course just visit [learn.quietrev.com](http://learn.quietrev.com).

OK, now for our tips.

1. Many kids today face extremely long school days, followed by hours of homework and after-school activities. Even if they love school, that's still a lot of being "on"—especially for a child who naturally wants some quiet time to recharge. Give your child the time she needs after school and before all those activities start—AND, she doesn't need to do an activity every day! Make sure she has plenty of time to just hang out at home, daydreaming, dreaming up her own projects, or just being still.
2. Help your child find role models in his chosen field of interest. This is especially important if his gifts are in a domain that's not particularly popular with his classmates. He needs to meet other kids who share his interests, and heroes and heroines to look up to.
3. Instill in your child a broad vision of what "leadership" means. Many gifted introverts achieve leadership in cerebral, intellectual, or artistic fields...and this often happen later in life. But while they're still in school, they are going to face a lot of pressure to achieve leadership in more conventional domains. If that path genuinely interests them, that's great, and you of course want to do everything you can to encourage them. But if they are marching to a different drummer, they need to hear you celebrating the path they're taking.

That's it for our show today.

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...And be sure to listen to the next episode of Quiet, when we sit down with actor, musician, and introvert Molly Ringwald. She'll reveal how her temperament has helped her to become a better actor and parent.

I'm Susan Cain. Thanks for listening!