## [00:00:00]

John Moe: I was talking to my wife the other day. I mean, I talk to her every day; we're married and in the same house after all. But I was talking to her the other day, and she asked me a question about the long-term future. She asked what I wanted to be—not in terms of a job that I wanted to have, but something broader, something deeper. How did I want to be able to describe my life? I said I wanted to be quiet. And by that I didn't mean not talking. There can be talking, but I wanted to be peaceful. I wanted to not be scampering around, having a million thoughts and worries and anxieties pounding on me all the time. I wanted internal quiet. A little bit of external quiet wouldn't be so bad either. I wanted to get to some quiet. Quiet.

(Long, quiet pause.)

It's Depresh Mode. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** I had an opportunity recently to interview Susan Cain, and Susan knows a thing or two about quietness. She's the author of the 2012 book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*. That book spent eight years on the New York Times bestseller list. Susan is also the author of *Bittersweet: How Sorrow and Longing Make Us Whole*. Now, Susan Cain has a new audio series called *A Quiet Life in Seven Steps*, which is available on Audible as of this coming Thursday. I found our talk to be helpful in getting closer to this idea of living with some more peace and quiet. I hope you'll find it helpful too.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

**Susan Cain:** I have spent the last—I don't know how many years it is; 20 years now?— exploring this realm of human nature that has to do with the quiet and sensitive and bittersweet and the seeking of depth and beauty. And I'm just well aware of how many people there are who live on that frequency or feel like they should be living on that frequency, that that's who they really are, but have trouble actually being there, because they're getting so many signs from the culture that that's not what they should be doing. Or they're just pulled away, you know, by the distractions and commitments and noise all around them. So, yeah, we're trying to help people bridge that gap.

**John Moe:** Well, I want to ask about these seven steps, because that sounds very convenient to me to have seven steps.

### (They chuckle.)

First, I want to know about your experience with anxiety. You are no stranger to anxiety, and we're a mental health program. So, I wanted to ask about that.

**Susan Cain:** Yeah, absolutely. So, I think as is true for many people who are oriented in this direction of quiet sensitivity, depth-seeking, all the rest—you know, what comes with that kind of sensitivity—I mean, the good side of what comes with it is you see a beautiful sunset or hear moving music, and you're just beside yourself with the joy and transcendence of it. The downside is that you're also more susceptible to the negative vibrations, let's say, that can come your way. So, for me, probably the hardest form of anxiety that I've dealt with in my life and still do is a kind of social anxiety. So, you know, I have this great irony that I now have this career as a public person and a public speaker. I've given I don't know how many gazillions of talks, but I have historically been someone with a real public speaking phobia. *(Chuckles.)* And so, I still kind of laugh in a kind of bemusement that I have this particular role in life.

And what I find is that when I'm doing the kinds of out there events that I've grown accustomed to, I'm pretty desensitized to it. Which is, you know, the all-purpose cure to anxiety is to expose yourself to the thing that causes the trouble in small doses until you do something right.

John Moe: Immersion therapy.

**Susan Cain:** Immersion therapy, yeah, in a small, little by little type of way. But when I do something new, then it comes back until the new thing has become old.

John Moe: How far back do you go with anxiety, with your social anxiety?

**Susan Cain:** Oh, gosh. It's really as long as I can remember. You know, I have somewhere in my office here from which I'm speaking to you—

### [00:05:00]

I have a—you know, one of those group photos from summer camp that they take where they take like the whole collection of kids who were in the group together all in one picture. And I'm standing in the top row, and I'm kind of like poised sort of halfway behind another kid so that you can't even see all of me. That's because I had a kind of shyness that has been part of me ever since then. And you know, like if we're talking now or if we met each other in person right now, I don't know that you would notice it. But I do feel that for shy people, it's always a part of them. It's always in there somewhere.

And the good thing about that or what I've come to understand is that the very same thing that makes people prone to anxiety or to shyness or whatever it is, is the exact same thing that makes them be able to turn in this direction of quiet depth and beauty. It's like you can't really have one without the other to some degree.

John Moe: So, what is that thing that overlaps?

**Susan Cain:** What overlaps is it's a sense of just heightened attunement to everything that's around you. So, for people who are shy, they're feeling a sense of heightened attunement to social dynamics. And they notice more the ways in which people are judging each other or

forming hierarchies. They're like acutely aware of it. And so, then they react out of that awareness. But the reason they're aware of it is because of this heightened attunement in general and the heightened attunement brings with it these incredible riches. Which is part of what I'm trying to explore in this *Quiet Life* series and community.

**John Moe:** You were this kid hiding behind the other kids at summer camp. How did—you know you grow up, you become this public figure. How did this idea, this philosophy of the quiet life emerge?

**Susan Cain:** You know, it emerged because first I wrote a book called *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking*. And that was about the power of introverts even in a world that is designed around extroversion. And then I wrote another book about bittersweetness, which is about the ways in which being aware of how life is such a mix of joy and sorrow actually leads to a richer form of happiness. And so, I've been living in this kind of space for a long time. And I've been talking, and I've been hearing from readers for all these many years. And I just understood from all these readers how deeply they want to occupy a frequency that celebrates being able to tune in to what is quiet and what is deeply meaningful and deeply beautiful and how the world won't necessarily hand that frequency to you. You have to find a way to get there on your own, so I wanted to help people get there.

**John Moe:** Well, let's talk about some of these steps, because we're not going to be able to fully explore some of these steps. But explain what are some steps that, for instance, our listeners could take to kind of find that quieter space, that introspective space, that space that's in harmony with their sensitivities.

**Susan Cain:** Yeah, I mean, there's all kinds of things we could talk about. So, one of the steps, for example, that I'm guessing would resonate with your listeners is the question of how do you live a truly creative life? And what does a creative life actually look like? Because we live with what is commonly called now the creator economy. And if you are a sensitive spirit or a soulful spirit or, you know, a creative type of person, you feel like you want to make your living through your creative products. And it is amazing if you can do that. But what I want people to understand is the difference between making a creative living versus living a creative life and how they're really not the same thing. And you can be deeply steeped in a world of art, creativity, beauty—whatever it is for you—even if you never produce an iota of it yourself, or let's say even if you never make a dollar off of your particular creative output. That doesn't stop you from living a creative life.

So, we talk in this episode about how to make a creative living, if that's the direction that you do want to go. I, myself, like made that gigantic leap.

### [00:10:00]

I used to be a corporate lawyer and then figured out how to become a writer. So, I have a lot of ideas about how to make that kind of a change. But at the same time, I think it's really important to understand that a creative life is not only about your profession.

**John Moe:** Creativity is an important factor for our listeners. On our Facebook group, they have Creative Share Saturdays. So, on Saturdays, everybody starts sharing, you know,

different things they've written, different art that they've made. How in—especially in an American society where it's so driven by capitalism and driven by—you know, the question of what do you do is a question of how do you trade your time for money, you know? How can someone learn to approach creativity as being something that they are in their life and not necessarily the way that they pay their bills?

**Susan Cain:** Yeah. Well, first of all, I love it that your community is doing that. And it's funny, 'cause it's something that we're doing also with the *Quiet Life* online community of having people find a place to offer each other a place to share work. But what I say to people and what I talk about in the audio series is, you know, like when I first left law and started writing, I never—I was 33, I think it was at the time. And I never for a moment thought I was ever going to make a living from it and never promised myself that I would. And I think that that was so important to the process. I said to myself, "The goal—" As I say, I was about 33, but I said to myself, "The goal is to get something published by the time you're 75." I was giving myself 40 years. And like, we're never going to make a living at this. So, I immediately sort of set up a kind of plan B backup plan of how I was going to make a living.

I started teaching classes, freelance and negotiation skills, which is something I had painfully learned as a lawyer. So, that was how I was going to pay the bills and did pay the bills for a while. And I kept my writing life as the precious, happy thing that I did with every spare moment that I could. And it was really important to me to be doing the writing always in conditions of beauty and pleasure. So, I had this cafe that—I lived in New York City at the time, and I had this cafe in Greenwich Village that I went to and sit in the sunny cafe window with other people who are also writing. So, it became this kind of community. And I did that for some years before ever publishing anything.

And I think even if I hadn't gotten published, I would still be doing a version of it, because I just loved it so much. So, that's all a long way of saying that like the takeaway is—number one, to always have a financial backup plan, partly just out of practicality. We all need to pay our bills, but also from a creative point of view; it's so important, because you don't want your creative impulse to be tamped down by the stress of earning a paycheck. It will drain all the pleasure away so quickly if you have that stress, and it will affect the creative decisions that you make. And I'll tell you, like when I first proposed and started writing my book *Quiet*, which—it went on to sell 4,000,000 copies. But at the time that I started working on it, I thought it was this weird, idiosyncratic project that, you know, if I was lucky, it was going to sell a few copies.

And if I had been thinking in financial terms, I don't even know if I would have written that book. Because I didn't really see it that way. And the agents who I shopped it to were all telling me that it was not a commercial idea. There was only one agent who saw the promise in it. All the others said, "This is not commercial." (*Chuckles.*) So, I really do think it's so important just for the creative spirit to divorce those two aspects of what you're doing versus how you're paying the bills.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: More with Susan Cain in just a moment.

# Transition: Relaxed acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Back with author Susan Cain, host of the new audio series, A Quiet Life in Seven Steps.

## [00:15:00]

I wonder if we could talk a little bit about your chapter or your step entitled "Do I Need to Be a Leader?" Because even that question, when I read that question, I was like, wait a minute. Maybe not? I thought everybody had to be a leader.

## (Susan laughs.)

I thought we were all programmed—you know, I remember in high school being sent to leadership camps to instill a sense of leadership in everybody. And we were told that everybody had to be a leader. You say not so fast.

**Susan Cain:** Oh no. Oh, this makes me absolutely <u>crazy</u> the extent to which education in particular, but then it continues into our working lives, says that everybody has to be a leader. And I do want to say there is a way to be a leader that is consonant with having a quiet life, so we can talk about that. But before we do, it's so important to say not everyone needs to! There's a thousand ways to live a good and peaceful and deep and meaningful life without ever being a leader. And there's a thousand ways to contribute to this world, to this society, to other people without doing it through leadership. There's many other things we can do.

(*Chuckles.*) So, I give the example in the audio series about—of a woman who—she wrote to me. I have this newsletter that I do. And she responded to my newsletter and told me about how she was an art lover. And she had been invited to be on the board of directors. I forget if it was an art museum, but of some kind of arts organization. And she realized she really didn't want to be on the board of directors. She just loved art. And eventually, she got to the point of feeling the inner peace to say, "No. You know what? I'm going to turn down this opportunity. It's not who I am. It's not how I want to spend my days." But so many of us think, well, that's what I got to step up to, because that's the only thing that's real is once I'm in leadership function.

**John Moe:** You mentioned there is a chance to be a sort of a leader, even if you're able to reach this quiet place in your life, this quiet life. What is that way?

**Susan Cain:** Yeah, I mean, so at the same time that I—you know, that I just gave that example, if you look at many of our great leaders, many of them are quiet people who are not necessarily in a full state of comfort all the time when they're in that role, but they figure out a way to perform the role in a way that expresses who they are and that is consonant with who they are. And this is true whether you look at corporate leaders or social leaders. My favorite example on the corporate side is a guy named Douglas Conant who had been, until not long ago, the CEO of Campbell's Soup. And when he first started at Campbell's, the employee engagement ratings were at the bottom of the Fortune 500. And by the time he stepped down, they were at the top.

And he is a very shy and introverted person by his own description. He is a seeker of quiet, but he found ways to connect with his staff in deep and meaningful ways. So, for example, he would find out who had been really contributing, and he would write to them letters of thanks and appreciation that really meant a lot to people. And during his time at Campbell, he wrote 30,000 of those letters.

John Moe: (Softly.) Oh my gosh.

**Susan Cain:** Yeah! So, yeah, yeah. You know, or then Rosa Parks is a perfect example. I always remember when she first passed away. I remember exactly where I was standing. I was listening to a radio interview—or not an interview, but like a radio program announcing that she had passed. And they were describing her as having been soft-spoken and timid by nature and quiet. And I remember how struck I was by that, because I had assumed up until then that someone who had done what she did would have been more of a—you know, not—let's say not a seeker of quiet. You know, a more kind of an out-there type of person.

But the fact is, if you tune into who you really are and the frequency—I keep using that word—the frequency in which you're at your best and in your greatest state of equilibrium, that's actually where your strength comes from.

John Moe: We have this idea of reaching the quiet life in seven steps. What is the quiet life?

[00:20:00]

Like, what is the ideal that—here I go with this leadership language again—(*chuckles*) that one should strive for! That's probably not the right way to think about it. But what is the state of the quiet life that that we can envision?

**Susan Cain:** It's an orientation to living that values quiet, that values depth, that values meaning, that values beauty, that helps you define success on your own terms and where you're figuring out how to thrive as your true self. So, it's the idea that when you really do get onto that pathway—and for the people who are listening who are this person, like they'll know right away what I'm talking about. When you're on that pathway, you have access to a richer and truer form of happiness. You know, it's not necessarily that form of happiness of like, "I just got this particular promotion or, you know, I'm stepping up to this role that I'm not even sure if it's right for me."

It's a deeper place. Which isn't to say, by the way—I want to stress the following thing. This isn't to say that we should never do things that are uncomfortable for us or that if you're a person who thrives on the frequency I'm describing, it doesn't mean you always have to stay in that frequency. Because I do think that we have to step outside our comfort zones for the sake of projects or goals that matter to us. But it is to say that if you're listening to this and feeling like, "Oh, yeah. That's the path that I really should be on,"—well, pay attention to it.

**John Moe:** In your experience talking about introverts and extroverts, is it black and white or is everybody kind of a shade of grey? Because I sometimes feel introverted and then

sometimes I'll find myself at a party having a really wonderful time feeding off the energy of So, I never know which one I am. Maybe I'm just somewhere in the middle.

**Susan Cain:** Yeah. I mean, it's hard to know just from what you've said so far whether you're in the middle or not. Because—and the reason I say that is that, even for somebody who's like a super extrovert, they're going to have their moments of wanting to be in quiet. And for super introverts, they have their moments where, you know, they're at the party—as you just said—and they're with people who they love and company they love and they're just having that moment. And you know, they're quite out there for that moment. So, nobody is all one thing or all the other thing. Or should be! We're really at our best and most developed and evolved when we can inhabit different planes.

And then there—but there are some people who are really what psychologists would call ambiverts, where they're really kind of in the middle of that introvert/extrovert spectrum. And I think all of us are somewhere on that point in the spectrum. And if you start paying attention, you kind of know where you fall. And I always say a good way to figure that out is to ask yourself if you imagine, let's say, a weekend where you have no social or professional obligations of any kind—so, you could spend the weekend exactly the way you want with as many people as you want. You know, tune into, well, how would you really spend it? No pressures at all. How many people would be in the picture? How well would you know those people? Are they—would it be new people that you're meeting at a party, and you're enjoying the stimulation and novelty of that? Or would it be your oldest friend or your family?

The answers to those questions give you great clues about how you actually want to spend your time.

**Transition:** Thoughtful acoustic guitar.

John Moe: More with Susan Cain after the break.

**Transition:** Thoughtful acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Back with author Susan Cain.

A lot of the people I talk to deal with anxiety on a disorder level. It's creating problems in the functioning of their life. They're dealing with depression on a level of a disorder where it's really creating some problems. How do you approach this quiet life when you also have these beasts that intrude? Because I can—if my depression is acting up and I get to a time of stillness, there's somebody who wants to invade that space, and it's depression. *(Chuckles.)* 

And so, how do you-how does someone manage those beasts along with this quiet life?

[00:25:00]

**Susan Cain:** I think that depression is so all-consuming when it's fully operational that in some ways you have to, I think, first manage that before you can do anything else. We could think of it in more preventative terms—that to the extent you can, when you're not in

depression—I don't mean you specifically; when one is not in depression—to the extent that you can inhabit a quiet life, if you feel that that's what your soul is craving—to the extent that you can inhabit that, you're less likely to be facing the dogs of depression in the first place. Because part of what depression is telling you is that something isn't working. Something's out of equilibrium. Something needs to be shut down.

**John Moe:** You've talked a little bit about the—and in your first book, you talk about a world that won't stop talking. I've had the experience—it made me think of times where I've been traveling and like wanting to sleep on a train, and there's so much noise and so many people talking, and this effort to try to block out the noise and conversation is keeping me awake, is putting me on edge.

Whereas if I can find a way to let some of the noise and chatter flow through me, so to speak, that I can find a more peaceful way of thinking. How does someone deal with the noise—let's say the noise coming from the rest of the world—and still try to maintain and achieve this quiet life?

**Susan Cain:** Yeah, well, I think what you're talking about in that example you gave is just that phenomenon that when you're in a resisting, kind of defensive crouch that everything hurts more. You know, it's like—just by analogy, like if you get a foot cramp and it's really painful and like if you go into full-on resistance mode, it's much more painful than if you just sort of breathe your way through it and wait for it to pass. So, the same is true with something like noise, you know. Like, even just at the most concrete level. Let's say there's construction outside your window. If you direct all your attention to the construction and how much you hate the sound of it, it's actually going to be worse than if you say, "Oh, there's construction. I don't like that, but here we are."

So, in the moment, the metaphor of breathing your way through it as opposed to sort of resisting it with all your might is what's most helpful, I have found. But I think the other question is how do you construct a life where you're not as often in that moment of having the construction outside your window? What would that involve? You know, does it involve relocating to a different part of your house? Or does it mean relocating your house to a different place where there is a little bit less construction? Does it mean making a change in how you spend your days and how you make your decisions of how to spend those days? All of that matters. There's a question that I often ask myself, and I'm always amazed by how little people ask it.

And the question is—like, let's say you're just making a decision, a job or a career decision. You know, and people will be thinking about the salary and, you know, where does it position them for the next five years and all these kinds of questions that matter. But you very often—you very rarely hear people ask the question of, "Will I wake up in the morning looking forward to my day, or will I wake up in the morning with some measure of dread about my day? Like, how much am I actually going to enjoy this and be in a quiet mind state of equilibrium if I make this particular decision?" And that really matters almost more than anything else.

**John Moe:** What happens if you make a decision, but yet it is on the side of, "I'm going to feel this dread; I'm going to feel this this pain, this hesitancy heading into this."

**Susan Cain:** Like, what if you have made that decision, and you're in that state of, "I'm living a life that involves a lot of dread and hesitancy."

# (John confirms.)

Yeah, so number one, you can think about-

## [00:30:00]

Well, In the long term, how do I make a shift? How do I turn my ocean liner in another direction to a life that won't involve this much anxiety and dread? You know, how do I turn in this direction of a quieter space? And knowing that those kinds of changes, just like turning around an ocean liner—those kinds of changes take a while to make them happen. So, you can't really expect that kind of relief overnight. So, while you're in it one of the best things that you can do is feel entitled to be who you are. Which means, okay, I am a person who, when called upon to do task X, Y, Z, I'm a person who reacts with anxiety and dread. That's who I am. That's cool.

Now, being the kind of person I am, what do I need to do to mitigate that? Maybe it means if I know that the task X, Y, and Z that my job calls on me to do is going to cause me lots of stress. Can I schedule into my daily calendar that, right after that task is done, I get to go and recharge for 45 minutes and not feel guilty about it? And that's just going to be my quiet time. Maybe if you work in an office, you leave the office, and you go and walk around the block and chill by yourself in solitude. Maybe for—you know, maybe you schedule time to call your best friend who always makes you laugh. You know, it's going to be different for everybody.

But it really starts with feeling entitled to the frequency that you want to inhabit. So, making the adjustments that you need to make so that you can be there as much as possible. And I also want to say like there is—especially for people who are more sensitive or prone to anxiety—I think there are very few pursuits that don't involve some degree of it. And that's just a reality that we have to accept. So, I'm not advising, you know, avoiding that altogether. Because there are too many, you know, sort of joyful and wonderful goals that we have that are going to involve some of that anxiety along the way. And that's okay. It's just a question of like—it shouldn't be too much.

**John Moe:** Right. So, your book, *Quiet*, came out in 2012, and this series is coming out in 2024. What have you learned about quiet in the past 12 years? How have your opinions—how's your perspective evolved in that time?

**Susan Cain:** It's evolved in the sense that I had no idea when I first started all of this how many people felt this way and how deeply people feel it. And a lot of those people, as you'd expect, are kind of natural born introverts. But a lot of them are not. A lot of them are people who you would meet and would have no idea that they are craving this frequency of quiet and depth and beauty and meaning. To some degree, this is a human craving. And so, what I've really learned over time is just like the enormous, enormous work that still needs to be done for so many people to get their lives aligned with this particular frequency. So, you know, if my first book, *Quiet*, was kind of raising awareness that there was this problem and there is

this disconnect, what I'm trying to do now is give people the concrete tools as well as the spiritual tools to be able to make the adjustments they need.

John Moe: Is it hard?

Susan Cain: To make those adjustments?

(John confirms.)

No, it's actually not that hard!

(They chuckle.)

No, you know, I think often what people just need is to know that, oh, number one, I'm not the only one who feels this way. Number two, oh! Oh, here's what I have to do! You know, I never really thought of that. I never thought of making that one adjustment.

John Moe: Are you still an anxious person?

**Susan Cain:** I mean, I guess it depends on what you mean by that. So, I'll just give you an example from just this past Sunday.

[00:35:00]

For our Quiet Life community, I did our very first candlelight Sunday chat. You know, 'cause we're inviting everybody who's part of this to talk about everything that's in the audio series together. And I had never done anything like that before. So, I was incredibly, incredibly. anxious that morning. You know, I call it suffering. You know, so I said to my husband, "Oh yeah, I'm suffering right now." And then once it was done, it was fine. And I think I'll do the next one and won't suffer like that, because I'm used to it now. And—or I know what to expect. So, it still happens to me. But it happens to me less and less, because more and more I have learned to live according to the principles of *A Quiet Life in Seven Steps*, right?

Like, those seven steps didn't come from nowhere. It wasn't like I just sat down and invented them. It was like I've been living them for all this time. So, I'm so much more peaceful or at peace than I used to be.

John Moe: Is the world noisier than it used to be?

**Susan Cain:** Yes. It is. Although, I mean I hesitated in answering that question just because I think the world has been very noisy for at least the last 125 years.

John Moe: Industrial Revolution?

**Susan Cain:** Exactly. Like, ever since then I do think there's been just a huge amount of noise. And I do think the lives that we're living online now, although they might happen

while we're quietly typing into our phones, create a <u>huge</u> amount of mental noise. So, yes. I think it takes a lot of paying attention to be able to carve out the quiet life that so many of us are craving.

**Music:** "Building Wings" by Rhett Miller, an up-tempo acoustic guitar song. The music continues quietly under the dialogue.

John Moe: Susan Cain, thank you so much.

Susan Cain: Thank you! It was such a pleasure to be with you.

John Moe: Susan Cain's audio series, A Quiet Life in Seven Steps, is available on Audible as of January 11th.

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Hi, credits listeners. *Depresh Mode* is made possible by your contributions. Our production team includes Raghu Manavalan, Gabe Mara, Kevin Ferguson, and me. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, "Building Wings".

Depresh Mode is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

Music: "Building Wings" by Rhett Miller.

I'm always falling off of cliffs, now Building wings on the way down I am figuring things out Building wings, building wings, building wings

No one knows the reason Maybe there's no reason I just keep believing No one knows the answer Maybe there's no answer I just keep on dancing

[00:40:00]

Jack Propst: I'm Jack Propst from St. Louis, Missouri, and I'm here for you.

(Music fades out.)

Transition: Cheerful ukulele chord.

Speaker 1: Maximum Fun.

Speaker 2: A worker-owned network.

Speaker 3: Of artist owned shows.

Speaker 4: Supported—

Speaker 5: —directly—

Speaker 6: —by you!