

Basic Truths &... **Observation Skills**

by Jeff Copper, PCC, PCAC, MBA



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Y FRIEND RICK GREEN of TotallyADD has a long history in television. He helped me use my basic observation skills to discover what I call a basic truth: *Facts don't sell; stories do.*

How can that be? A fact is a fact. Stories can have facts, but fiction rules. Stories rule, and the stories we tell ourselves control our attention. Eureka! That explains so much. Let's look at some examples.

An ADHD salesman once told me he was motivated to do his expense account because his company probably owed him over \$15,000. Fact: He had not filed an expense account in over six months because he hated the task of doing his expense accounts; they were time consuming, tedious, and boring.

Another client told me that making a call to his relatives about his daughter's dance recitals was easy. Fact: He had procrastinated about doing it for three weeks only to find out how hard it was because he would have to make numerous other calls. Why? Because he wasn't able to answer questions like where to park, what to wear, or how long the event would be.

One of my clients—who is a psychiatrist with ADHD—read articles (stories) to me about how those with ADHD are disorganized, that he was disorganized and couldn't self-regulate, and that I wouldn't be able to help him. Fact: He had graduated from medical school, completed his residency, and had a long-established profitable practice. If that is disorganized, sign me up!

Over my years of coaching, I've learned to ignore the story and use basic observation skills to discover many basic truths that I've added to what I learned from Rick. Here are a few:

- You would be dead if you were not motivated.
- Everything you ever did was because you were motivated to do it.
- Everything you have not done was because you were not motivated to do it at the time you thought you should do it.

My salesman was not motivated to do his expense accounting. It was effortful and boring, and there were other things he would rather do.

Anything you think is easy that you haven't done is actually hard. Admit it. If it were truly that easy, it would have been done by now.

If people with ADHD were truly disorganized, they would not be able to function in the world as we know it, much less graduate from medical school.

My mother recently reflected how she used to observe the sky before deciding to do the laundry because she would need to hang the clothes on the clothesline. She couldn't trust the weatherman's story because he was wrong more often than right.

My point is this: Basic observation is boring, dull, and effortful. The story, however, is engaging, exciting, and captures attention. Corporate America has cracked the code on this. They don't sell what you need or what you want; they sell based on the story you want to hear. When that doesn't work, corporate America sells it to you again. Why? *Because you buy the story of what you want to work, not facts.*

Using the basic truths I learned from Rick, I was able to observe other basic truths that helped my clients acknowledge the facts around why they were not motivated to do their expense accounts, tasks were not as easy as they thought, and they did indeed have a sense of organization. With such limiting beliefs removed, each of these clients flourished as we found ways to move past identified obstacles.

The art of basic observation is lost to the narrative story. It reminds me of a poem by Daniel Goleman:

**The range of what we think and do
is limited by what we fail to notice.
And because we fail to notice that we fail to notice,
there is little we can do to change
until we notice how failing to notice
shapes our thoughts and deeds.**

Now, substitute the word "see" in the place of "notice" and you'll get the point of this writing. 🗨️

A certified ADHD coach based in Tampa, Florida, **Jeff Copper, PCC, PCAC, MBA**, specializes in coaching adult individuals and entrepreneurs who have been diagnosed with ADHD later in life. He is a speaker, an attention expert, and host of Attention Talk Radio and Attention Talk Video. Learn more at www.digcoaching.com.