

# ADHD and Social Chal

**THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF ADHD CAN TAKE A TOLL**, not only in personal life, but also in the workplace. Especially in this time of job loss and uncertainty, it would benefit everyone to be mindful of the social challenges ADHD can sometimes present in the workplace.

Many times a job is spared or someone is promoted not just because of their workplace performance, but rather because of their ability to form and maintain social relationships in the workplace. Fortunately, there are strategies, structures, and supports to help mitigate many social errors and missteps. It is also equally important to lead with your strengths.

### Lead with your strengths

Everyone has strengths. Sometimes with ADHD there is so much emphasis on what is not working well that strengths are overlooked or placed on the backburner. What strengths do you bring to social relationships? What relationship skills have people acknowledged either in or out of workplace in the past? Are there ways to use those strengths more in the workplace? While it is important to manage your challenges, it is also important to exploit and build on your strengths.

#### Try this:

*Each day intentionally set out to build or improve a relationship at work though an area of your strength. If you are kind, find a situation to demonstrate your kindness. If you are funny, brighten someone's day. Look for an opportunity to shine each day.*

### Play the game

How many times have we heard the following remarks: "I'm not going to play the game." "I'm just going to do my job and that should be enough." "My work should stand on its own."

Unfortunately, the workplace IS a social environment. Unfortunately, the "game" IS going on. And unfortunately you ARE "playing." You just might be playing poorly or passively, but you are in the game. It can

be compared to investing money. You might decide to not invest your money right now. You have it under your mattress. You are however still investing your money. You are choosing to invest it at zero percent interest under your mattress. Or, if you take your hands off a wheel and choose not to steer a moving boat, you are still responsible for the direction of the boat. If you are not actively paying attention to relationships in the workplace, you are less likely to be doing well—especially with ADHD onboard.

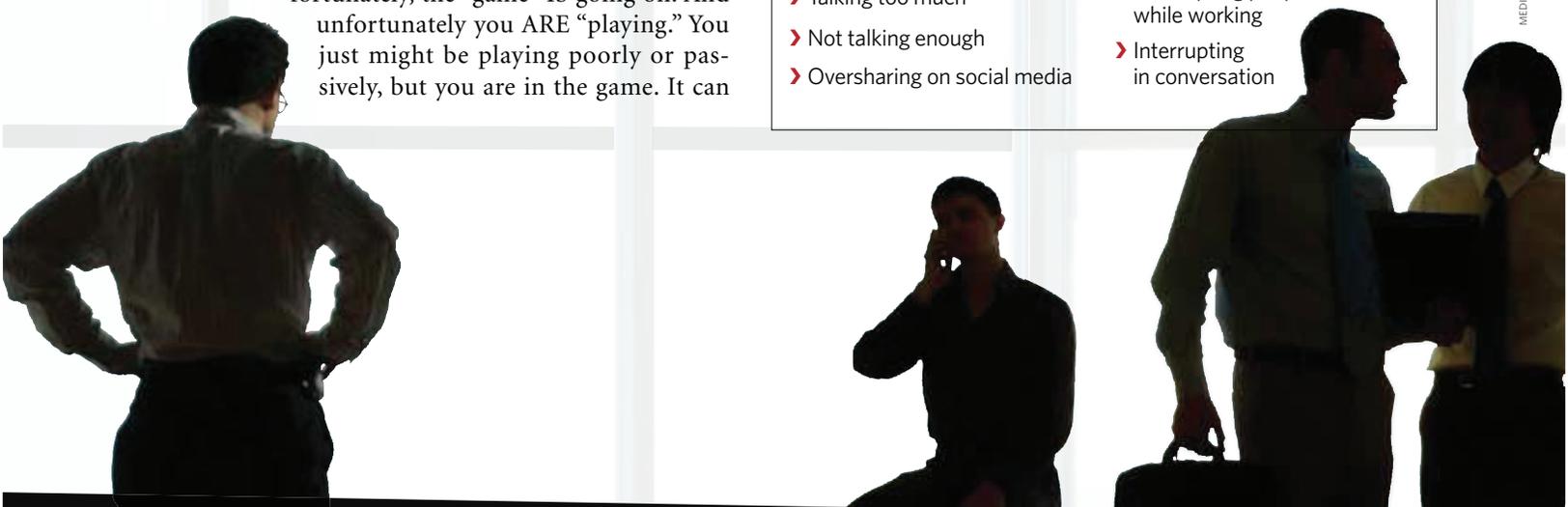
**The workplace IS a social environment.**

Relationships generally require work for individuals with ADHD to manage well. Challenges with fluctuating attention span, impulsivity, and (at times) hyperactivity generally need to be actively managed. It is understandable that adding these social skills to job

performance skills feels like an additional burden. However, if workplace relationships are not managed well, your job performance may not matter as much as you think.

### Social Challenges in the Workplace for People with ADHD

- › Not recognizing importance of relationships at work
- › Impulsive emails or texts
- › Talking too much
- › Not talking enough
- › Oversharing on social media
- › Holding others hostage with lateness
- › Missing subtle cues—subtext
- › Interrupting people while working
- › Interrupting in conversation



MEDIAPHOTOS, CALVIO / ISTOCK, BONOTONI, STUDIO

# Challenges at Work



## FOR MORE INFO

Check out the Job Accommodation Network for more tips on workplace accommodations: <http://askjan.org/media/adhd.html>.

### Pause before posting

Impulsivity can create enormous challenges in the workplace. Thanks to technology, there are now methods of passing on information in seconds. This is not necessarily good for those with ADHD who are working hard to navigate social relationships. If you are upset, it is never a good idea to instantly send an email expressing your feelings.

#### Try this:

*Take the time to create an email but do not include the intended recipient's name in the email. Write your email and place it in your draft file. Wait at least a few hours, and better yet a day, and look over the email again. This way, in the event you inadvertently hit send, the email will not go out since there is no address included. Many an email has gone out unfiltered and fractured relationships.*

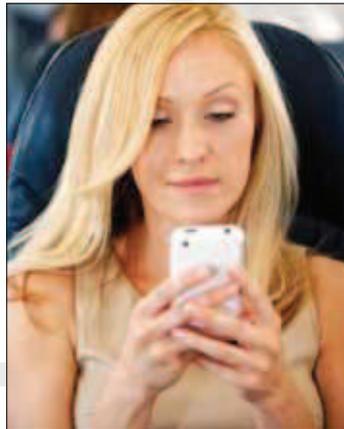
*When writing an email or a text, assume that it will or at least could be re-sent. It is all too easy to forward an email. In the workplace, this is very common. If you always write them with that in mind, it may help you avoid a few landmines.*

Facebook is not confidential. Although Facebook is a form of social media, it is not just social and isolated from work and work relationships. Facebook is also viewed or could be viewed by people from your workplace, too. You don't need a permanent record of a fleeting thought or a private look at your social life. That goes for Twitter too.

#### Try this:

*Only post things on Facebook that you wouldn't be embarrassed to have your boss or your employees see.*

*Use face-to-face or phone conversations for private or personal matters.*



### Interrupting

If you have ADHD, you might want to share a thought as soon as it comes to you. In your enthusiasm, you could miss the social cues that let you know that sharing that information now might not be a good idea. Interrupting people at work is often viewed as an annoyance. People generally try to avoid annoying people and you don't want that to happen to you.

#### Try this:

*If you see someone and want to share information or if you want to go to their office, try to stop and ask yourself, "Is this a good time?" Just like you have systems like checking for your keys and wallet, get in the habit of checking to see if the person is working or socializing before interrupting them. Sometimes an interruption is necessary, most of the time it is not.*

Interrupting others in a conversation is a common ADHD trait. Interrupting is also on the list of social skill errors. While you might interrupt because you are afraid you will forget what you want to say, or because you get caught up in the excitement of the moment, people often feel that you are rude when you interrupt. They might feel like you don't value what they are saying.

#### Try this:

*Have a notebook handy to jot down things you want to say if you are on a conference call or in a meeting where it wouldn't look unusual.*

*If you must interrupt, let the person know that you don't want to permanently interrupt, but could they please help you remember to ask them about whatever it is you want to say. This way you are interrupting a little, but also still honoring the person who is speaking.*



### Late again

Running late is common for individuals with ADHD. Time management is also a relationship management issue. Running late is a quick way to frustrate and alienate relationships. It can even cost you your job. One of my clients was fired for lateness even though he was an outstanding employee. It was demoralizing to the team to have him arrive whenever he pleased.

When you are late at the workplace, others often take it personally. In addition to thinking that you don't take your job seriously, to them it could also mean you don't value their time. Whatever you wanted to do was more important to you than what they wanted to do. You are holding them hostage waiting for you. It may also leave others picking up the slack. None of these are endearing qualities for building successful relationships.

#### Try this:

*Redefine your concept of "on time." For most, if you have a nine o'clock meeting you would aim to be at the meeting at nine o'clock. Change your target to at least ten minutes ahead. Plan to be at the nine o'clock meeting at eight-fifty. Bring something to do, or better yet, plan to connect with people and build relationships in the few minutes before the meeting.*

*If the meeting involves travel, add additional time to your arrival. Allowing an extra thirty minutes can save you in the event of a traffic delay.*

**You are playing the "game."**

### Talking too much or too little

Regulating speech can often feel like a full-time job for individuals with ADHD. Some have been accused of talking too much, while others for not jumping in enough.

#### Try this if you talk too much:

*It's difficult to build and maintain relationships if you use monologues rather than dialogues. Use a vibrating setting on your cell phone or watch to cue you every few minutes to remind you to stop talking.*

Consider asking someone you trust to prompt you with a glance, pen tap or even a foot stomp if you are headed over the line.

#### Try this if you don't talk enough:

*You may want to preplan a few interesting comments to insert in advance. Current events or interesting experiences add to building relationships.*



When in doubt about what to say, asking a question about the other person will usually save the day. Most folks enjoy talking about themselves.

### Subtext and picking up social cues

It would be great if people always said exactly what they meant. It is difficult enough for individuals with ADHD to hear all that is said. In the workplace, more often than non-work environments, people often drop subtle hints and clues. Office speak is often dialed back due to others' navigating relationships—playing the game.

Individuals with ADHD need to develop ways to not only hear what is said, but to also pay attention to the subtle clues that would let them know if what was said is actually what is meant.

#### Try this:

*Try checking your understanding of a meeting or conversation with someone who seems to navigate relationships well. Run your understanding by them to see if that is also their understanding.*

*Watch part of a television show that is prerecorded without sound. By only looking at the faces and body language, see what you can pick up. Replay that section and check your accuracy. Replay a few times if needed to see what you might have missed.*

### Who is on your team?

You may want to work with an ADHD coach or psychologist to improve your ability to navigate relationships. This would be especially important if you have already been alerted that there are concerns about your performance and need to make changes as quickly as possible. There are also a few books available as well as teleseminars on the topic to help.

### It's worth it

Good relationships in the workplace can translate into more money for you and your employer—and more job security. It's probably worth the extra time and energy to learn to play the game well. You might even find a few friends along the way. 🗣️



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