

The ADHD ENTREPRENEURIAL CHALLENGE



by David Giwerc

Adults with ADHD are three hundred percent more likely to start their own businesses, writes Garret LoPorto in *The DaVinci Method* (Media for Your Mind, 2005). While you may find that invigorating, failing to identify and understand your ADHD can have dire consequences for your business. Learning how to harness your strengths and create daily momentum while managing your challenges requires a delicate balance of awareness, skills, and experience. These factors can make or break your ability to create, manage, and sustain a profitable business.

My undiagnosed ADHD affected my success as an advertising executive. It was also instrumental in making me a successful entrepreneur.

In 1984, I was living in Manhattan and working my dream job for a division of Young & Rubicam, one of the world's largest advertising agencies. I was twenty-eight years old, single, making money, and working with nationally recognized clients and their brands. I

wore an expensive, stylish suit and sported the confidence of a young man whose every interaction was a possibility to bring in more business and more money.

As a sports enthusiast, I loved my job. I handled all of the professional sports marketing in stadiums for the giant Miller Brewing Company. I had six field account executives who reported directly to me and were responsible for the NFL, NBA, and MLB teams in their regions.

LESSONS LEARNED

Do you think you are a potential entrepreneur?
Here are some of the lessons I learned over the course of my career.

Understand your unique brain wiring.

Identify how you process information and select tools that can capture your spontaneous, creative ideas in the most productive manner. Even before I knew I had ADHD, I would draw mind maps; circles represented the main ideas and the spokes of the wheels represented the subtopics. I literally came up with campaign ideas and presentation outlines using index cards, napkins, anything on which I could write my spontaneous ideas. I would convert them into strategic ideas, campaigns, presentations, even new product innovations. Later, when I became an entrepreneur, I always carried a pocket notebook to capture ideas that would just pop up in my brain.

Identify what you can't do so it doesn't get in the way of what you can do.

Pay attention to what you're paying attention to, identify what stimulates your brain with a positive intention, and pursue it. Administrative tasks are necessary for the maintenance and profitability of your business, but if they're not the best use of your strengths, you're going to have a difficult time activating your brain and creating positive forward momentum.

I once had a client who needed a loan to expand his business. He invited the

bank to come make a pitch, but right in the middle of the presentation, he excused himself to get a cup of coffee and never came back. Not a great way to get the extra capital you need to expand your business! He wasn't being rude or thoughtless; his ADHD interfered with the process because it wasn't the role for which he was best suited.

Delegate roles and specific tasks to those in your company who have the right skills. If the best use of your attention is creating effective presentations and enforcing the mission of the company, don't disengage your brain and make it difficult to gain any kind of positive momentum.

Pay attention to your successes and strengths.

Identify what energizes you so you can sustain your business efforts throughout the day. Take breaks and focus on tasks, exercise, or music that provides instant energy, positive emotions, and empowers you to initiate important tasks.

Create a success diary—a notebook, folder, box of pictures, anything that can contain records of your achievements and

identify what worked in the past. Keep it readily available. Your success diary externalizes your memories by providing visual or written prompts to remind you to focus on your strengths. By revisiting your achievements, you will become energized and your enthusiasm will energize your employees and customers.

A success diary can help you bypass negative patterns that immobilize you and impair your executive functions. Overcome negative thinking by revisiting successful experiences, which automatically evokes positive memories and emotions that provide positive energy to activate your brain.

Identify support for challenging tasks.

When you go into business for yourself, you must identify what kind of support you need for tasks that derail you but are crucial to the financial success of your business. You must also identify what support you will need in order to use your creative strengths daily.

Respond rather than react.

Pausing to contemplate your best options gives you the ability to consciously respond versus spontaneously reacting to business situations as they arise.

Without putting on your mental brakes, you cannot access your best options. You will have a tendency to react with old patterns of behavior/action that have not served you well in the past.



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My love of sports and my sincere excitement for my clients' business goals made this important account a natural fit for me.

Creative stuff came so easily to me. While others spent hours preparing a pitch, I could invent a presentation on a dime and practice it in my head. I knew that scripts didn't work for me. I was spontaneous, and rehearsing a script would have driven me crazy. I just needed my mind map with its keywords and circles, something I usually jotted down on a napkin or index card.

The creative side of my job came naturally to me, but I dreaded the administrative tasks of submitting expense accounts, writing reports, and the different things going on in the business. It was just brutal. The attention required for these activities had always been a struggle. I knew that if I spent too much time on administrative tasks, it was going to take me away from those areas where I excelled. So, what did I do? I ignored the administrative stuff altogether.

You can imagine the result: Paperwork piled up until it became a small mountain of unfiled reports, unfinished forms, and unanswered correspondence. I became immobilized just thinking about it. It wasn't that I was lazy or didn't want to do it. I didn't know that my ADHD was creating internal neurological battles in my brain. When the task involved people, presentations, projects, and pictures, I was a hundred percent dedicated to doing great work. But with the administrative side, the harder I tried to pay attention, the more my brain shut down. Fortunately, the substantial support staff at the large advertising agency compensated for my lack of administrative abilities.

Discovery and diagnosis

Years later, when I made the decision to go into business with my dad, a successful builder, I assumed my creative marketing skills would be the magic wand to success, freedom, and financial reward. I never took into account all the support structure I had in place in my corporate position, and assumed my dad would provide those same mechanisms in our new partnership. Big mistake. My dad, albeit super successful, had no administrative support. He had an office and a telephone, and he expected me to take care of the rest.

Our first five years together were a nightmare. Until I discovered my ADHD and was properly diagnosed and treated, I struggled with overwhelming anxiety, emotional volatility, and piles of incomplete paperwork that my dad expected me to complete.

When I became aware that ADHD was a challenge of inhibition that required being able to put on the internal brakes of my mind, I learned to pause to pay attention to what I was paying attention to and focus on what I could do really well. By noticing the disharmony in my body, I shifted my negative focus on difficult tasks to using my marketing and presentation skills that energized and motivated me. My dad and I were eventually able to convert our struggling business into a successful, respected apartment community.

ADHD, creativity, and entrepreneurship can be a wonderful team when understood and when the strengths of entrepreneurs are integrated into daily actions.

I almost quit until my dad hired administrative support so I could do what I did well. After working with my dad for over a decade, he was ready to retire and I was ready to help him sell our business. We eventually sold it to a large, diversified, well-run regional real estate management company.

Finding and filling a void

Many individuals with ADHD find it helpful to hire a well-trained, certified coach who specializes in working with entrepreneurs and executives with ADHD. This specialist will support them in effectively navigating the different challenges of business and their ADHD.

Entrepreneurs with ADHD are full of creative, stimulating ideas, but they need to clearly identify their daily intention. They must see how their attention and subsequent actions are closely aligned with their intentional purpose. ADHD, creativity, and entrepreneurship can be a wonderful team when understood and when the strengths of entrepreneurs are integrated into daily actions.

In 1996, I began my own ADHD coaching practice, working with executives and entrepreneurs with ADHD. I had discovered a significant void in the marketplace. It was the solution for many individuals with ADHD who need the support and partnership of well-trained ADHD coaches. I was not only passionate about coaching, but was equally passionate about training future ADHD coaches to empower people with ADHD to live the life they truly deserve. My attention was focused on my heartfelt intention of creating a training program desperately needed by millions of people with ADHD.

With my attention focused on my clear intention, I created the ADD Coach Acad-

emy in 1998. Today, ADDCA is the world's largest comprehensive ADHD coach training program, with students from over twenty-five countries. 📍

David Giwerc, MCC, MCAC, BCC, is founder and president of the ADD Coach Academy. For

over fifteen years, his coaching practice has been dedicated to empowering entrepreneurs and executives who have ADHD. He serves on the advisory boards of the Professional Association of ADHD Coaches and the Attention Deficit Disorder Association. Giwerc is the author of *Permission to Proceed: The Keys to Creating a Life of Passion Purpose and Possibility for Adults with ADHD* (Vervante, 2011).

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