



Living with Inattentive ADHD

by Barbara Luther, MCAC, MCC, MA

IHAVE INATTENTIVE ADHD, and in many ways, I'm a good example of doing well with it. I started college while still in high school, graduated with honors in three years, and got my master's degree by age twenty-one. After a variety of jobs, I found my calling: teaching. It invited me to be creative, spontaneous, alive, genuine, playful, and vulnerable all at the same time. I've been teaching for over thirty years and still love it.

On the other hand, while I have pages and pages of positive feedback, I still hesitate to say that I am a gifted trainer and coach. I'm easily bored and easily overwhelmed. My emotions dictate what I can accomplish on a daily basis. I have to vigilantly watch my thoughts and self-talk or I'll quickly fall into rumination and negativity. I have friends and colleagues everywhere but no physically close friends. Thinking and ideas are my life, so I live with many, many books and lots of paper clutter.

This is my personal experience. Many things I describe certainly happen to most folks, but it is the number of experiences and areas of impact plus the intensity experienced that, at least for me, distinguishes my inattentiveness. Every person's experience will be different, but I hope my examples will give you a better feel for what it's like to live with inattentive ADHD.

MOST DAYS, I am content and happily engaged in my work. Then there are other days when I get anxious or depressed, and I am at risk for getting stuck. I float between being contentedly engaged and feeling like it is hard to get mobilized—yet I am quite productive overall. Again, I believe I am a pretty typical Inattentive—articulate, intelligent, yet often floundering.

Sometimes it takes me hours to compose one email. I write it and read it over, change something, read it over again, and repeat and repeat. I realize that I'm doing this, and I even promise myself, "Okay, I'll just reread it once more then I'm sending it." But then it's fifteen minutes later and I'm still working on the same email and telling myself it's crazy to still be working on it. When someone asks several questions in one email, I set it aside and often forget about it. But if people write with one question, I shoot back a response pretty fast.

If the email asks for a decision, well, it may take me days to respond. Or, I'll take an inordinate amount of time to lay out several sides of the issue and end up saying it's their decision. I'll do my darnedest to push decisions off to someone else. I don't want to displease anyone, so if someone else decides, I'm happy. Other times, a question sparks me, and off I go into a lengthy response that may be the impetus for another piece of writing entirely. I totally forget what I was working on or what deadline is coming up.

I tend to be overly trusting of others, and sometimes this gets me into trouble. At this point in my life, I know this is an issue for me, and I try to be vigilant. Sometimes, I'm able to pause, ask a friend for input, and save myself. But too often, I still ignore or override my good sense and get scammed. I'm too embarrassed and ashamed to tell anyone about these events. I've whipped myself unmercifully already, and I can't bear the possibility of being laughed at or put down by someone else for my clueless behavior. I often wonder if other inattentives have trouble with this, too. I have the sneaky suspicion they do.

Sometimes I head out into the world without attending to important details. I find myself out in the middle of nowhere, shocked that it never occurred to me to bring water and sunscreen since I'd be in the sun all day. Or, I forget to bring a coat and gloves when I'm traveling north

into snow and ice. When I clue in, I stop and wonder, "How could a relatively smart gal be so clueless?" This keeps happening and astonishing me every time. I recognize it once it's happened, but there was never a signal or thought beforehand—that I noticed—that would have clued me into being prepared. Since I can't see rhyme or reason for its happening, I can't figure out what sort of system or prompt would help. I do use checklists, but how does one recognize that she is totally in her head and checked out when her mind is so busy?

DESPITE THOSE NEGATIVE EXAMPLES, there are aspects of my inattentiveness that I wouldn't change for anything. I love my bright, playful attitude, and I still feel quite young at heart. Being asked to brainstorm with someone is like being offered a huge bag of candy. I could eat it all at once!

I also love my quick, bright mind and my gentle, compassionate, loving spirit. I'll pretty much do anything for anybody who asks. While I marvel at this, given my experience, I am trusting and mostly optimistic. I love to be generous and nurturing. I'm genuine—what you see is what you get, to a fault. I love to learn and explore all kinds of subjects. It's an incredible treat for me to learn something new then get to share it with others who will benefit.

When a conversation or idea sparks my imagination, I jump right into writing and can dash out some good stuff pretty quickly. It's also fun to collaborate on writing projects. I can hyperfocus and bring together ideas in articulate ways. Daydreaming and creating all kinds of stories in my head is relaxing and refreshing for me. My mind is always going, and I like that.

As an educator, I am always studying my subject. The amount of research on ADHD continues its explosive growth, but there is still way too little on the inattentive presentation. I find that ironic, because as we age, according to scientists, hyperactivity and impulsivity usually diminish while inattention stays the same or increases. 🍌

*A Master Certified ADHD coach, **Barbara Luther, MCAC, MCC, MA**, has trained, mentored, and assessed thousands of coaches over the past 20-plus years. She is director of training for the ADD Coach Academy and founding president of the Professional Association of ADHD Coaches. Luther coaches inattentive professionals and adults to rewrite their "what's not working" stories into appreciative and empowering stories about their unique brain wiring and strengths. She is prominently featured in the *TotallyADD.com* video, *ADD & Coaching: You Don't Have to Go It Alone*. A regular speaker at ADHD and coaching conferences, Luther speaks on a variety of ADHD coaching topics. She hosts a community of learning for coaches who want to remain in touch with coaching competencies at www.SoaringCoachesCircle.com.*