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ADHD: Getting Things Done: A List of Obvious Organizational Solutions

DIG Coaching is the leading coaching practice for adults and children looking to manage attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) symptoms and attention deficit disorder (ADD) symptoms. We focus on managing symptoms of attention deficit disorder, adults with ADD, or adults who have children with ADHD. DIG Coaching, led by attention coach Jeff Copper, helps adults and children (particularly those diagnosed with or impacted by attention deficit disorder or its symptoms) in life or business who are stuck, overwhelmed, or frustrated. DIG Coaching helps adults and children get unstuck and moving forward by helping to open their minds and pay attention to what works.

ADHD: Getting Things Done: A List of Obvious Organizational Solutions

By Jeff Copper, Manager & Head Coach, DIG Coaching Practice LLC



When it comes to getting organized and getting things done, I believe what works depends on our individual differences. Still, the best place to start is to work your way through the list of obvious solutions and then make adjustments based on what works for you. The purpose of this article is to list many of the most common solutions in the context of getting organized, staying on task, and moving past procrastination. So here goes.

Pause: Stop for a minute and pay attention to how you currently manage time. Do you go to the extreme, over-scheduling your life so you have no free time? Consider not scheduling back-to-back events. Leave time in-between to think about and prepare for whatever is happening next; ease yourself into it.

The need to waste some time: Like everyone else, adults with ADHD need time to recharge their batteries and simply relax each day. Are you scheduling time for yourself? You know it's okay to do so. There is no need to feel guilty about it. So take that nap or watch TV. If you think about it, taking time to chill is time management, too.

Create the right work environment: People with ADHD often function best amid unconventional surroundings. Experiment around. Find your best working environment. For example, some might use earplugs to ensure silence; others may find they are more productive when listening to loud music. Also, if you use ADHD medication, it's generally best to schedule difficult tasks for times when your symptoms are fully covered.

Technology: Buy computer planning software and the appropriate mobile device that you can carry with you (like a day timer, cell phone, smart phone,

or watch). Program it to notify you (ring or buzz) a few minutes before what you need to do in order to alert you to upcoming appointments. Carry a notepad or a device with you wherever you go. If you think of something important or remember something you need to do, you'll be able to write it down.

Replace negative with positive self-talk: People with ADHD tend to beat themselves up, which serves no one. Replace negative self-talk with positive talk (or at least no talk). Try telling realistic but positive messages like replacing "This will take forever" or "It's so late already" with "I might not finish today, but I can complete half of it."

Define your objectives: Be clear before you start on what you are trying to accomplish in a specified time frame. For example, when you are studying, your objective might be: "I want to learn as much as possible about my topic in an hour." Plan on being interrupted when the hour is up and move to the next thing.

Just get started: Procrastinating is a black hole. Many times it is best just to get started even if you start poorly or in a sloppy way. If you need to write something, for example, start by typing random letters on the page. It is gibberish, but at least you will no longer be looking at a blank page.

Do something interesting first: Rather than follow traditional behavior-management cues with after-the-fact rewards, many people with ADHD find it helpful to do something they love first, to "light up" the brain, to pique their interest. After that, it's easier to move on to less enjoyable tasks.

Take breaks: Those who fail to get away from a project occasionally are likely to start avoiding the project altogether, or just plain give up. Taking breaks helps prevent burnout.

Commit to a start and end time: If what you are doing is boring, knowing you could quit after an hour can keep you going. Conversely, if you are hyperfocusing on stopping at a fixed time will keep you from avoiding projects that need to get done but are more boring.

Break it down: Take apart a task to create a bunch of mini-projects, and then attach an individual deadline to each. A smaller project can seem far less daunting than a single large project. Consider asking a supervisor or a co-worker to set deadlines for you to help you remain accountable. Some may break down projects into tasks and intermingle projects by varying the small tasks on different projects for variety. Others schedule parts of projects and spread them out over multiple time periods.

Don't bite off more than you can chew: If you take on a new project, you may have to cut back on other activities in order to finish it on time. Consider how much time is available in your busy schedule and plan accordingly.

Deadlines: Set deadlines for yourself and others. Consider posting them. Break down projects and assign deadlines to each task. Many with ADHD respond positively to this, as they need the adrenaline rush to do anything. By setting internal deadlines, they can still work under pressure to finish each portion of the project "on time" and thus the entire project on time. Many ADDers dislike deadlines and are often reluctant to set them for others. Be strong! Ask others to get back to you by a certain time. This will prevent you from losing momentum and will free you from the excuse that you couldn't keep working because you were unsure about what to do next. Post your deadlines where you will see them. This will remind you to use your time wisely.

When time runs short, delegate: Don't assume that you must do every portion of a project. In many cases, it makes sense to outsource or delegate, especially the repetitive boring tasks.

If all else fails, hire help: Realize that hired help costs money, but what is the cost of not getting done what you need to get done? Those with ADHD often don't put a value on their time. There is a cost, and many times it far exceeds the cost of hiring help.

Make time physical, visual, or auditory: For many with ADHD, time is abstract. They need to make time concrete to experience its passage. Consider getting an egg timer, hourglass, or other visual clock that makes the passage of time physical.

Transitions: Transitioning from one thing or project to another can be problematic for those with ADHD. Try to take some time or a break from one task to the next to clear your head. This will allow you to wrap up what you were doing in your mind or allow you to start thinking/organizing your mind for the next task at hand.

Beware of multitasking: You might think you can, but your brain can only have one thought at a time. Multitasking involves bouncing around from one unrelated thought to another. This might seem like no big deal, but if you are unclear, thinking your way through a problem or trying to hold your concentration while bouncing from one unrelated thought to another is inefficient. When you need to focus, it is best to remove distractions, so check your cell phone at the door, turn off instant messaging, unplug the phone, clear your desk, or simply remove anything that could take your attention away from the task at hand. Some ADDers, for example, find it difficult to focus when surrounded by visual clutter.

In summary, this is just a list of obvious solutions you might try. Understand, it is unlikely that you'll be able to obtain your potential with this list, but it is a good place to start. Excellence can be achieved by finding your individual not-so-obvious solution based on how you are different. You can learn to find these on your own or get help from an ADHD coach.

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