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## STRATEGIES TO TURN A D D INTO AN ASSET

**By: Rifka Schonfeld, Director Of S.o.s.**



Over the last several years, many professionals have been exploring the ways in which ADD (Attention Deficit Syndrome) can actually help people become highly successful, rather than hindering them. This was in fact a theme of this publication's August 2011 cover article, "Attention Deficit Hyperactive... Aptitude". And when we consider the many famous people throughout history who purportedly had ADD, such as Albert Einstein, Frank Lloyd Wright, Vincent Van Gogh, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Abraham Lincoln, it becomes quite plausible to imagine that ADD really can be leveraged into an advantage.

So what made these people such huge successes, when ADD seems to make life difficult for so many others? What's the secret?

In their book, *Delivered from Distraction*, Drs. Edward Hallowell and John Ratey report their findings from interviewing and researching successful people with ADD. They discovered numerous common habits shared by these highly effective personalities:

- They focus on doing what they're good at.
- They delegate what they don't do well to others, as often as possible.
- They connect their energy to a creative outlet

- They connect their energy to a creative outlet.
- They get well enough organized to achieve their goals – they don't have to be very well organized, just well enough to achieve their goals.
- They ask for and heed advice from people they trust, and ignore the dream-breakers and finger-waggers.
- They make sure they keep regular contact with a few close friends.
- They make an effort to be positive and discount negative feelings.

### Getting on the Right Path

Management of ADD, for both children and adults, should be broad and include a wide range of interventions. Because ADD does not simply go away, assistance should be provided over the long term. Drs. Hallowell and Ratey provide a comprehensive plan to change ADD from a barrier to an asset:

- **Diagnosis:** Good diagnoses come with an identification of strengths and weakness, which in turn opens the door for effective management.
- **Promote talents:** Find what you excel in and try to play to that strength. The more that you practice what you enjoy, the more you will master it. Regardless of the activity or hobby, having something that you can fall back on it times of stress will keep you grounded and confident.
- **Education:** Learn everything you can about ADD. The more you know about the disorder, the better you will be able to cope with it. You need to explain ADD to those around you – such as your family and close friends (or your child's teachers) – in order to help them deal with issues that might arise.
- **Change in lifestyle:**
  - **Sleep:** Most people with ADD do not get enough sleep. They end up staying up at night involved in various (often useless) activities. This in turn means that they wake in the morning feeling groggy and exhausted. Getting enough sleep (getting into bed with enough time in order to wake without an alarm clock) is one step towards conquering ADD.
  - **Diet:** Helen Rasmussen, a senior research nutritionist at Tufts University gives several suggestions about supplements that can help focus those with ADD (of course, as with any supplements, talk to your doctor to decide what is best for you):
    - **Vitamin C:** Helps regulate the synapse of dopamine, which is needed in treating ADD.
    - **Folic acid and B-12:** Improves cognition and prevents cell death.
    - **Water.** Staying well-hydrated helps your whole body function more smoothly.
    - **Avoid foods with ingredients you can't pronounce:** these foods are often overly processed and can have unwanted effects on your body.
  - **Exercise:** Physical movement wakes up your mind and body if you are feeling distracted. Hallowell and Ratey argue that ten minutes of physical exercise offers the same benefits (without the side effects) as a dose of Prozac combined with a dose of Ritalin.
  - **Positive human contact:** Spending time with people who provide you with inspiration and love you unconditionally can offset the reprimands of the outside world.
  - **Structure:** When you create a habit of making lists, using filing cabinets, or logging information into a digital planner, you can compensate for a mind that might not hold onto all of the random details.
  - **Medication:** When indicated by a doctor, medication is a viable option for those who suffer from ADD, but it should ideally be used in addition to, and not in place of, the strategies mentioned above.

By recognizing their challenges and leveraging their talents, both children and adults with ADD can transform a disorder into an asset, just like Albert Einstein did.

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