Creating a To Maximize Productivity BY ROBERT M. TUDISCO, ESQ.

here are many things adults can do to minimize the challenges and the detrimental effects of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) on their lives and on their self-esteem. While it may be difficult to completely control brain function, there are environmental factors that can certainly make matters worse. How you set up your home or office environment can make a big difference in either contributing to your challenges or capitalizing on your strengths.

I struggled with this problem both before and after my diagnosis and offer some of the strategies that have helped me get through some very difficult times. The examples that I offer are not meant to suggest the coping mechanisms themselves, but to illustrate the process that helped me arrive at them.

Understand yourself

Any exercise in developing coping mechanisms for AD/HD should begin with a deep look inside yourself. It is important to understand your weaknesses as well as strengths and, more importantly, how they operate. This type of analysis is essential to tailoring an environment that is conducive to maximizing your strengths and minimizing your weaknesses. In this context, experimentation is also very important and you should not be afraid of failure. Understanding why a certain idea did not work for you can provide valuable information in designing a system that does work for you.

Identify distractions

In designing a productive work environment, identify distractions with a view toward eliminating or minimizing them as much as possible. Understanding what is particularly distracting for you is very important at this step. Are you prone to audible distractions, visible dis-



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Understanding yourself and your habits is important in creating an environment that helps you be productive.

> tractions or both? Does that represent a constant or not? For instance, there are times when I need silence in order to focus, and there are times when the silence in my environment intensifies the distracting noise in my head. During those times, I need to use either a "white noise" in the background or select a certain type of music to occupy the part of my brain that seeks to wander. Being able to understand this about yourself and your productivity can be very empowering by giving you an element of control over things that have previously made you feel helpless.

While the Internet can be a very useful tool for research and in some cases productivity, it can also be a "vortex of time suckage." I

believe that the Internet in many ways represents a model of an AD/HD mind. Opening up one window often leads to opportunities to open several others. It is only too easy to click on a link or links to seemingly related topics until you are eventually far afield from where you need to be. For me this has become so bad that I have received an error message saying that I have too many windows open, overloading the working memory in my system. This problem has been made much worse with each technological advancement, such as high-speed and wireless access in which the portal to the Internet is always open. If this is a distraction to you, learn to close that feature down. As I write this article on my laptop computer, I have disabled my wireless Internet access so that I can focus on this project.

Identify a productive place

Designing a safe and productive place does not always mean a place within your own home or



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How people set up their home or office environments can either capitalize on strengths or contribute to challenges.

> office. Learn to experiment in different settings to see whether they are helpful for your productivity. For instance, no matter how much you minimize distractions in your home or office, there may always be subtle reminders of other projects that you have to do or ways to procrastinate. If that is the case, learn to pick up your project and move to another place. I have tried moving from my den to a part of the house with fewer distractions and even going to a local library to seal myself off from the distractions in the house. At work, I have walked away from my office and set up in a conference room to work when necessary.

> Aside from visual distractions, there are other factors that contribute to a loss in produc

tivity. At work, for instance, telephone calls can often bring me off task. People also frequently walk in to my office to chat or ask a question. Set parameters if you can. Block off a half hour or hour in which you have someone take messages for you or direct your calls into voicemail, if necessary. Don't be afraid to tell friends and co-workers that you are working on something important and that you will get back to them shortly. You are not being rude.

Identify your prime time

Many of the challenges that having AD/HD poses involve time. Individuals with AD/HD may have difficulty accurately perceiving time, estimating the timing of projects, managing time or realistically appreciating the time left in a deadline. Another aspect of time that is often unexplored is determining what time of day is the most productive and using it to your advantage. Here again, understanding yourself and your habits is very important. Are you more productive in the morning? Are you less productive in the afternoon? Do you get more done in the office before everyone gets there and the phones start ringing or at the end of the day when things quiet down? The answers to these questions can be invaluable in making the most of that prime time. This in turn will enhance productivity or minimize potential for failure.

Find an outlet

I believe that for all of us there is an outlet or hobby in which we experience focus and control. This may be in stark contrast to the rest of our lives. I was fortunate to find that running and writing are two outlets that give me focus and control. I discovered this shortly after my diagnosis and have put it to good use. Running clears my head and allows me to work through obstacles. It helps me break down projects into a logical sequence. In short, it gives me the type of control that I never had in any other aspect of my life. Understanding that mechanism has helped me use my running to help fight procrastination



Don't be afraid to seek the help of a professional coach to develop a system of structure and accountability.

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Conference Notes

Robert M. Tudisco, Esq., will hold sessions on Free Appropriate Public Education for Youth with AD/HD: More than Just a Good IDEA and Avoiding Stigma during CHADD's annual conference in Chicago, III., Oct. 25-28, 2006. Visit www.chadd.org for more information.

and regain control. There are times at work, however, when I can't just pick up and go for a run. During those times a short walk goes a long way to break the spell of hyperfocus or procrastination. If that is not possible, I will also write in a journal to work through the conflict. I often think of my writing as a psychological run to help me work through a problem.

Develop external support

Regardless of how hard we try to work around our problems, we often find that the biggest obstacle we face is ourselves. When that is the case, don't be afraid to think way outside the box and even outside of yourself. When all else fails, seek the assistance of a nonjudgmental third party, such as a friend or co-worker. Let that individual know the constraints you are under and your need to focus on your need for for structure, support and/or accountability. This can go a long way toward minimizing

your distractions. Support staff can divert phone calls and minimize personal interruptions. They can also provide intermittent reminders and help with establishing and holding you to self-imposed deadlines. For example, I once had a chronic problem picking my son up from his daycare program on time. His pickup time fell during my most productive hours late in the day, and I found it almost impossible to tear myself away from my desk. To work around this problem, I went to my paralegal, who left work around the time I needed to leave to get my son, and I told her that she was no longer allowed to leave the office unless she took me with her. I tied the event to an external one and literally took myself out of the process. It worked very well.

This model of support is essentially a simplified version of AD/HD coaching. If you can't set up similar mechanisms for yourself, don't be afraid to seek the help of a professional coach who can help you develop a system of structure and accountability that can work for you and get you to where you need to be.

Develop a healthy state of mind

Think of a healthy and productive environment not just as a place, but more importantly as a state of mind. Identifying and using some of the principles and thought processes above, you can get back the level of control over yourself and your environment that is often lacking. Think of that control as empowerment to succeed. Good luck and remember that you are not alone. There are many of us out here just like you. ■

Robert M. Tudisco, Esq., is a practicing attorney and adult diagnosed with AD/HD. He has researched and written extensively on adult coping mechanisms and legal and advocacy issues. Mr. Tudisco is a member of CHADD's board of directors and Attention!® magazine's editorial advisory board. He welcomes questions and comments at his Web site, www.ADDcopingskills.com.



Author Robert Tudisco, his son and wife finish their first race together. "Running clears my head and allows me to work through obstacles," Tudisco says.