

ADULTS FACE MANY CHALLENGES and transitions throughout their careers, including competing for jobs, starting new careers and entering new jobs or companies. The difficulty of obtaining and sustaining employment for many adults with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) makes the success of those who do accomplish this very inspiring.



Conference Notes
Rob Crawford,
M.Ed., will conduct a
presentation on career
counseling for adults
with AD/HD on Wednesday, October 26, 2005,
at a special pre-conference session free to all
registered attendees
prior to CHADD's
Annual Conference.

AD/HD in the Workplace

There is little research to explain why some individuals with AD/HD succeed in the workplace and why others do not. Workplace settings present a wide variety of diverse occupational research challenges. Because the impact of AD/HD on the individual varies from setting to setting, researchers may find it difficult to determine what aspects of a person's job performance or lack of performance can be directly attributable to the disorder.

Common Barriers to Success

Many adults who struggle to cope and survive in the workplace tend to face similar obstacles:

- Lack of social skills and understanding of the take to be successful? demands of the workplace The last question i
- Unawareness of personal limitations
- Use of circular logic and rationalizing away personal responsibility when faced with failure
- Retreating when unsuccessful
- Difficulty with job training because of an inability to perform or catch on to multi-step/multi-task procedures
- Inability to distinguish aspects of the job and environment that are controllable from those that are not

Factors that Contribute to Success

There are key factors that can help individuals with AD/HD perform well in the workplace. A good starting point is for them to clearly understand what personally matters most in their job or career. Focusing on the meaning, nature and importance of their work ing the following:

can provide a roadmap through difficult and challenging times.

For many, getting a job is easy; keeping it is difficult. The following is a self-inventory to identify what individuals value most in a job or career:

- ✓ What aspects of this job or career are consistent with my values and beliefs and will help me further these values?
- ✓ What working conditions do I need to feel happy?
- ✓ What trade-offs and consequences am I willing to accept to help me determine if this is a good choice for me?
- ✓ What level of risk am I or should I be willing to take to be successful?

The last question is particularly important when it comes to disclosing or not disclosing a diagnosis of AD/HD to the employer.

Disclosing AD/HD to an Employer: Risks and Benefits

In some instances, employees may choose to disclose to their employers that they have AD/HD in order to receive accommodations or adjustments in the work environment. They may be interviewing for a new position or are being considered for a promotion that carries added responsibilities, which may be directly affected by AD/HD-associated functional limitations. If they choose to disclose their AD/HD, they open themselves up to additional employer scrutiny and must be prepared to answer various questions, including the following:

Many adults with AD/HD who struggle to cope and survive at work tend to face similar obstacles to job acquisition, retention and career satisfaction.

40 attention@chadd.org / August 2005 August 2005 August 2005



By understanding the environment and culture of the company, individuals can determine if the job is right for them and if they have the required skills, knowledge and attributes for the position.

- What is the nature of the disability and/or functional impairment?
- What kind of modifications does the person need in the work environment?
- How will the AD/HD interfere with the employee's performance?
- Why should the employer hire the candidate (or give him or her the promotion) when there are other applicants who do not have AD/HD?
- How will the candidate be able to lead a team and get the work done?

By keeping in mind that the employer really just wants to know what the individual can do, how they will do it and what results they can expect, the person with AD/HD can focus on the functional assets and limitations that are relevant to the work environment. It is important that he or she does not obsess or have anxiety over what the employer's intentions are in asking questions or voicing concerns.

Focus and balance can be achieved by deciding on a position, career or promotion after looking at what is required both during training and on the job. Avoid job searches that are too narrowly or broadly focused. Individuals should resist the impulse to go after jobs just because of the money, such as "earn \$10,000 a week from home, no experience necessary." Instead, they should concentrate on jobs that are interesting to them and consistent with their values and beliefs.

Workplace Culture:

Finding an AD/HD-Friendly Environment

It is important for individuals with AD/HD to assess whether the workplace culture and environment of a prospective job and/or career are "AD/HD friendly." To assess compatibility, it is important to determine whether the company is receptive to disclosure and tolerant of personal work habits, such as messy work space, need for quiet work area, or a need for breaks to get up and walk around. By assessing these factors, individuals with AD/HD can anticipate no-win situations to be avoided. By understanding the environment and culture of the company, individuals can determine if the job is right for them and if they have the required skills, knowledge and attributes for the position.

To understand the required skills and knowledge, the individual should analyze and compare technical performance factors such as how personal skills, abilities, training, education and experience relate to specific positions within the company. There will also be a need to identify essential functions and environmental considerations of the job. It is also helpful to anticipate potential functional assets and limitations related to AD/HD that could affect the expected levels of job performance. This last step would include determining what compensations, accommodations, modifications or strategies for AD/HD are practical

AD/HD in the Workforce

and reasonable for the employer.

It may be helpful to develop a long-term career ladder that estimates time, experience and continuing education requirements to move up to higher levels of responsibilities. Prospective employees should find out how many and how often potential openings occur. In-house training and continuing education programs can help individuals demonstrate and establish their job-related and personal competency, capabilities and capacities, which usually result in greater flexibility on the part of the employer to handle adjustment problems with the new tasks.

When offered a promotion or position, the individual should obtain specific timelines for performance evaluations and gain an understanding of when and how performance will be evaluated. If there is a need for accommodations, he or she can propose and develop a process through which the employee and employer can review the effectiveness of the interventions and need for adjustments.

While there seems to be evidence of many success stories of adults with AD/HD who have found a career "niche" in which to flourish, most of those seeking entry or upward mobility in the workplace have to live and play by the rules of a world that has little understanding of or sensitivity to the emotional impact of having this hidden disability and the costs to the individual of trying to "keep it together." Long-term satisfaction and a sense of personal accomplishment, competency and value for adults with AD/HD will happen in response to reframing personal and employment experiences into positive aspects of life and growth.

Recognizing and building on individual assets and managing functional limitations can put people in charge of their own future. Utilizing these strategies and pragmatic approaches can lead the adult with AD/HD to increased personal competency by helping to identify and find success or satisfaction in both life and work.

Rob Crawford is the co-founder and CEO of the Life Development Institute, a comprehensive program for adults with learning disabilities, AD/HD and other related hidden disabilities.



Job Performance Evaluation Components

- Ability to get along with co-workers/staff
- Ability to learn new tasks
- Self-direction and motivation
- Speed of work
- Accuracy of work
- Ability to follow general directions
- Ability to follow complex directions
- Frustration tolerance
- Safety

Possible Barriers to Disclosing an AD/HD Diagnosis

- Employers are not necessarily well informed about AD/HD
- Employers are ill-equipped to understand and provide appropriate accommodations
- Adults with AD/HD are usually unaware of their job competencies
- Adults with the disorder have not been taught how to determine accommodations based on job tasks
- Many individuals with AD/HD are not prepared to be effective self-advocates