

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About AD/HD Coaching (But Were Too Busy to Ask)

Bryan Goodman, MA, with Nancy Ratey, EdM, MCC, SCAC

TO BETTER UNDERSTAND AD/HD COACHING and the role it can play in the lives of those living with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, Bryan Goodman, MA, talked with Nancy Ratey, EdM,

MCC, SCAC, a former CHADD professional advisory board member. Ratey is a Master Certified Coach and the author of a recently-released book on the topic.



Nancy Ratey, EdM, MCC, SCAC

Let's start with the basics. What is AD/HD coaching, and what is an AD/HD coach?

AD/HD coaching is a personalized service tailored to a person's individual needs. The coach works with clients on problem areas and daily issues caused by AD/HD, such as time management, procrastination, prioritization, impulsivity. The goals of coaching are to help clients become more self-aware of how AD/HD manifests itself in their daily lives and to help them find ways to get around these problem areas by using strength-based strategies. They will then hopefully be more effective in their personal and professional lives. The coach is not there to hold a client's hand. The coach is there to be on the sidelines helping the client to remember his or her pitfalls and learn ways to self-initiate change.

The coach acts as an exterior monitor of sorts, and points out areas of difficulty, with the goal of helping the person achieve his or her goals, be they personal, financial, physical, or professional. The client is the one who sets the agenda. This is what makes coaching unique. And the client is the one who crafts and tailors the coaching partnership to meet his or her individual needs. For example, some people have problems chunking down large projects, so the client would work with the coach in learning to prioritize. That may mean the client gets smaller pieces done over time. A strategy for the client would be to set "false deadlines" with the coach. The client would then be expected to deliver the agreed-upon pieces of the project at the agreed-upon time. The coach would use "accountability" as a way to keep the

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process moving forward. Coaching is practicalityoriented and action-based. It focuses on the client moving forward. It doesn't dwell on the past or on "why" the client didn't do something. There is no judgment from the coach. The coach asks questions such as, "What got in the way? What can you do about it?" Coaching is solution-based.

What attracted you to coaching?

I was fortunate enough to grow up with a father who "coached" me. I saw the positive effects it had on my life, and I wanted to share the techniques and strategies with others. I knew if I could do it—not only survive with AD/HD but be successful—that others could, too. Also, it's very concrete and strategic. I like to see people make progress, and coaching is all about tangible, measurable progress.

The National Institute of Mental Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and CHADD recommend a multimodal treatment approach (including behavioral management, medication, parent training, educational adaptations, and so forth) as the most effective way to treat the disorder. Why isn't coaching on this list?

It's surprising how much coaching is mentioned in a lot of the mental health literature these days. There is no research showing it works, but what we do know is that the brain is plastic and can learn new ways of compensating. A coach helps the person with AD/HD learn new ways of doing things by helping him or her monitor progress over time. The client can actually "fake it till he or she makes it" and develop new habits and ways to get around

old self-defeating patterns. I think it is only a matter of time before coaching officially becomes part of the multimodal approach.

What does the research say about coaching? Do we need more research on this topic?

There definitely needs to be research. There is none now. I am the board vice president of the Edge Foundation, which recently received a grant to research coaching. Readers can go to www.edgefoundation.org for more information. But for now we know anecdotally that coaching works. It seems to be the missing piece in the treatment plan. Many of my clients come to me after they have been in therapy and after being on a trial of medications. During this time, they find that they are a lot more capable, but just don't have some of the skills to get to where they want to go. That it is where coaching fits in—again, it's skill- and action-based.

Who can benefit from an AD/HD coach? Are we talking mostly about adults?

Kids, parents, and adults of all ages can benefit from coaching. The standard is to make sure that clients are ready, willing, and able to be coached. That means they want to be coached and to work in a partnership, they admit and accept having AD/HD, and they are actively looking to make changes. There should be no other issues present, such as untreated depression, which would interfere with the coaching. The important thing to remember is that coaching is not a magic bullet. The person has to



Nancy Ratey's Seven Coaching Tips

> Pre-Plan the Day Before

Always plan the next day before going to bed. This way you'll have in your mind what you are going to do, when, and how. You will wake up more directed and centered.

Create Book Ends

Get up and go to bed at the same time each day. Having regular body rhythms, as well as predictability and consistency in your schedule, will help increase efficiency.

> Exercise! Exercise! Exercise!

This is KEY to peak performance and to gaining focus and control. Don't skip it ever!

> Think in Terms of Threes

To reduce stress, ask yourself to name the three most pressing items for the day that, once completed, will make you feel a sense of accomplishment. These do not have to be BIG items; they can be returning a phone call, filing a file, etc. Write them down and keep that list

in front of you. Cross each item off as you complete it. Then move to your next three pressing items.

> Stop Avoiding

A well-known author once told me, "You become the first thing you do in the morning. If you want to be a writer, write." People in general know which item on their to-do list that they want to do last. Identify that item and do it first. That is the first step in gaining control!

> Park It

Distracted by random thoughts? Park them on a piece of notepaper to stay focused on the task at hand! By doing so you can go back to these items later and act on them if necessary. Often these distractions are just that distractions and not priority items.

> Take Time to Play

Take time off as seriously as you do your year-end report. The cost-benefit of not taking breaks from today's busy life only sets you up for burnout and loss of control.

want it. Clients have to take responsibility for their actions or lack of actions. Coaching doesn't work for everyone. It takes time and effort on the part of the client.

How do you make an assessment about a new client's coaching needs? Is testing involved?

Some coaches have questionnaires or use different kinds of tools to get at the needs, strengths, and desires of clients. Generally, I start out with a history and ask clients about what attracted them to coaching. I want to know what areas of life are out of balance for them, and where they want to start, and what goals they want to set. Coaching is holistic, so we look at all areas of the person's life: health habits, socializing, home life, finances, and professional life.

Once we pick out some of the areas that we want to improve upon, we then look at obstacles that are in the way. What is preventing these clients from obtaining their goals? Most of the time it's their AD/HD symptoms and the repetition of old habits or strategies that don't work.

We try to discover some strategies to put in place to help them obtain their goal, chunk it down, and then create accountability around each piece or part of the goal. Through regular check-ins, via phone and e-mail, we can then track progress and identify the "traps" and build bridges to get around them. For example, if the person is always late or loses track of time because he or she gets stuck on the Internet, we

beeps every hour on the hour to help the person "hear the passage of time," do a self-check, and ask, "Am I doing what I said I would do?" This will help the person begin to be more conscious and mindful of his or her goals and the commitment to completing them in a timely manner on a regular basis.

Further Reading

- > The Disorganized Mind: Coaching Your ADHD Brain to Take **Control of Your Time, Tasks, and Talents**, by Nancy Ratey, St. Martin's Press, 2008 (Available through the CHADD Shop at www.chadd.org).
- > Coaching College Students with AD/HD: Issues and Answers, by Patricia Quinn, MD, and Nancy Ratey, Advantage Books, 2000.
- > CHADD's What We Know fact sheet: "Coaching for Adults with **AD/HD."** available on the NRC website, www.help4adhd.org/en/ living/coaching/WWK18.
- > The ADDA Guiding Principles for Coaching Individuals with Attention Deficit Disorder, available at www.add.org/articles/ coaching guide.html.

Do you find that there is one particular area of life, such as the workplace, in which people need the most help from a coach?

As I said above, coaching is holistic. Most people bring a mixed bag of things they want to work on, both personal and professional. If I had to choose one thing, I would say that most people come to me to learn how to better selfmanage and to consistently work on and reach their goals in all areas of life.

Give us some examples of the type of coaching tips you would provide to reduce a person's struggle in each area of life.

Use a watch or timer that goes off every hour and stop and do a self-check in. Basically, do an evaluation of where you are in completing a particular task, to make sure you did not get sidetracked and that you are doing what you said you would do.

Keep a to-do list as well as a "home for thoughts." Many times people will get sidetracked by competing thoughts, and if something comes into their head they will just "do it" without thinking of the consequences. So, if you have a notebook

or a piece of paper or a digital organizer, you can simply "dump" or "park" the thought or idea, stay on track with your current goal, and then come back to the other one later. Basically you "delegate" the thought until later. Many times what one thinks is important and urgent in the

> Keep a journal so you can track your progress and also so you can write down and process what your repeated patterns are. This kind of reflection is critical to developing self-awareness and to learning what takes vou off track.

> > Act like there is a Web camera watching you throughout the day, and that your boss and coworkers are watching you.



This helps to heighten awareness of your actions and allows you to be more vigilant in staying on track

Create a list of your patterns, and post it or come up with a mantra. This can be something as simple as "Remember, I forget consequences of my actions" or "Don't check email." Basically, create ways to engineer your environment to keep your current task or goal at the forefront of your mind, so you don't get off track and do something of lesser priority.

How does one find a good coach? Are coaches primarily located in cities?

There are several organizations that post directories of coaches. Go to their websites and search for the type of coach you want. (See the sidebar that lists resources.)

What does one look for in a good coach? Are there certain credentials? Do you have to have a college degree?

First and foremost, the person has to be trained in AD/HD coaching techniques. So find out where the person was trained. All coaching schools offer a certificate of attendance for their courses, but there is not yet a formal certification. The field is self-regulated, so no outside credentialing body exists. The Institute for the Advancement of ADD Coaching just came out with a coach-cre-

dentialing program, however. Finding a good match is key, which means interviewing several coaches. Present a problem, and then ask the coach how he or she would coach you on it. You need to feel connected to the coach. The coach should also have the skill and ability to coach you. Basically, it's a personal preference.

Web Resources

- > CHADD's Professional Directory www.chadd.org
- > National Resource Center on AD/HD www.help4adhd.org
- ADHD Coaches Organization www.adhdcoaches.org
- > Edge Foundation www.edgefoundation.org
- Institute for the Advancement of AD/HD Coaching www.adhdcoachinstitute.org
- ADD Consults www.addconsults.com/coaches/index.php3