

THE IMPACT OF ATTENTION DEFICIT IN THE WORKPLACE

The American Psychiatric Society and US Department of Education recognizes that ADHD affects over 15 million Americans. It is a neuro-biological disorder that is highly genetic and lasts throughout one's life. Among adults, CHADD (Children and Adults with ADHD) maintains that **4% of adults experience symptoms** and some debility. These individuals are highly **susceptible to depression, anxiety and substance abuse**. They often experience career difficulties, legal and financial problems as well as troubled personal relationships. **They are apt to feel incompetent and lack self-confidence** because of all of the negative feedback they have continuously received.



How can ADHD present in individuals? Dr. Thomas Brown, Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the Yale University School of Medicine, describes six clusters of cognitive challenges associated with ADHD: **problems with organizing, prioritizing and initiating work; difficulties with focusing, sustaining and shifting attention; troubles with sustaining effort; inability to manage emotions; memory issues and complications with self regulating actions.**

What are some of the challenges for employees with ADHD in the workplace? The severity of ADHD symptoms is on a **continuum and manifests uniquely** in each individual. This can present as issues with **organizing paperwork, prioritizing tasks, estimating the time it takes to complete tasks and getting started on projects in a timely manner**. It can also impact the ability to **stay alert, maintain effort, regulate impulsivity, sustain and shift attention from one project to another, process information in a reasonable amount of time, and remember facts while actively processing other information**.

What are some **strategies that managers can share**? First of all, be a good role model. It's the **"see-do model" of leadership**. Direct all employees to arrive early to work, meetings and sales calls. As Vince Lombardi used to say, "to be on time is to be late." **Give clear instructions, followed up in writing**, if possible. Offer **frequent constructive feedback**. Communicate with employees in a **positive manner**. Responsibilities should be **transparent and clearly delineated**. Provide a place for everything, with enough file cabinets and a uniform filing system that is used by all employees. Situate employees with ADHD in a low traffic area where they will have less external stimuli. Headphones can be effective for some workers.

Here are some other suggestions that can improve functioning. Knowing that people have the ability to grow and change, self-awareness is the first step. Understand the strengths and challenges of all employees. **Recommend that all workers keep a planner, maintain a realistic "to do" list, exercise to relieve stress, break up tasks to small manageable chunks, take breaks to regain focus, keep their work space free of distractions, use Post It notes or other reminders to prompt recall and encourage a structured, predictable daily routine.**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was established by congress in 1990. It covers businesses with 15 or more employees and is meant to level the playing field for people with disabilities. A worker must disclose and verify his ADHD diagnoses in order to receive accommodations under ADA. Consult with your lawyer or legal staff for further details and clarification. *(Continued on Page 2)*



Recent research provides strong evidence that ADHD is a perplexing condition that extends throughout life, but it does not have to be debilitating. Programs to improve self-management skills such as coaching, cognitive behavioral therapy, and meditation have shown to be successful. **Stay positive as change takes time and effort.**

I urge you to **educate yourself about ADHD and executive functions in order to understand what others are experiencing.** Check out the CHADD website. Read up to date articles and books by experts in the field such as Russell Barkley, Dr. Tom Brown, Ned Hallowell, Sari Solden, Kathleen Nadeua and Ari Tuckman. Knowledge is power.

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