

How Adults with AD/HD Benefit from Personal Coaching

by Jen Zobel Bieber and Christine Cookman

Personal coaching isn't just for CEO's or rock stars. More and more psychiatrists recognize coaching as a key resource when it comes to practical support for adults with AD/HD. Drs. Edward Hallowell and John Ratey in their landmark book *Delivered from Distraction* write, "...coaching – working to help a person get organized and make plans to achieve goals – is one of the most practical and efficient treatments for adults who have ADD..."

Coaching complements and supports other areas of AD/HD treatment by ensuring that new skills and habits take hold and grow. Through weekly, one-on-one sessions with clients, the coach provides support, guidance, and practical tools in the areas of self-management, time management, decision making, prioritizing, and simplifying.

Clients see results when it comes to everyday challenges, including those with direct effects on treatment, such as taking medication, making appointments, and paying bills on time. Furthermore, coaching is an active collaboration, one that encourages the client to redefine "what is possible", leverage his or her strengths, and live a life that is personally and professionally fulfilling.

Personal Coaching Works in Five Ways:

1. EASE

Individuals with AD/HD often have the best of intentions but struggle to deliver on them because they do not have the necessary support in place. Weekly coaching sessions act as a touchstone and provide structure and accountability, especially when it comes to "administrative tasks" that tend to prove particularly challenging, including cleaning, shopping, and filing. The coach helps the client break overwhelming tasks into manageable steps, identify resources, and push past self-limiting beliefs; this supports the client to take independent action between sessions. During sessions, the client is encouraged to view his prior week's actions through the lens of an experiment, reflecting on what works, what doesn't, what he's learned, and what approach he wants to take next. Clients become more resourceful and self-assured, evidenced in very tangible ways, such as improvements in diet, exercise, and sleep, as well as more consistent completion of those pesky "administrative tasks". The coaching process promotes a cycle of action and learning that firmly establishes beneficial habits while eliminating draining ones, leading to sustained and effective change.

2. CLARITY

The AD/HD client's desire – and hence, the focus of coaching – goes beyond overcoming everyday challenges. Clients learn to balance priorities, in the here and now, alongside planning and meeting longer term objectives. At first, a client with AD/HD may carry a "to do" list that reads like a stream of consciousness (ex. buy dog food, decide if I should marry Janet, fix screen door, plan my next vacation). Coaching helps the client differentiate, prioritize, and manage goals, while learning to recognize what is truly meaningful to him or her. The coaching engagement is often the first time in their lives that clients get to clearly delineate their goals, values, talents, likes, and dislikes. The coaching relationship becomes a supportive space from which to discuss, plan, and take action on "the big stuff" -- building a career, partnering with a spouse, or pursuing a long held dream. The "to do" list comes into sharper focus as clients get to take aim at that which matters most to them and has a lasting impact on their personal satisfaction.

3. CONFIDENCE

Most adults with AD/HD have an overly developed “negative muscle”. After years of steady “practice,” they are adept at negative self-talk, pessimism, shame, guilt, frustration, and worry. Coaching provides a safe environment for clients to share their experiences without worry of judgment – to dig into the messiness without first having to sort it out. The coach reinforces this by holding no other agenda than to support the client in meeting his or her own goals. The coach also helps the client spot when he or she hyperfocuses on the negative, illustrating innovative ways to shift attention instead onto active, creative outlets. Furthermore, the coach encourages the client to acknowledge his or her strengths and accomplishments. For instance, some clients find it energizing to keep a weekly “wins” list of accomplishments to share at the top of each session. Over time, clients build another type of “muscle,” one that allows them to give and receive acknowledgement, and appreciate themselves and the results they create.

4. CONNECTION

The toxic brew of distractibility, procrastination, shame, and guilt can combine to keep an adult with AD/HD feeling cut off from friends and family. Oftentimes, it can seem like an overwhelming hurdle to reconnect after falling out of touch. In and of itself, the coaching relationship provides connection and combats isolation. Beyond providing structure and guidance, the coach is an ally, mentor, and cheerleader rolled into one. More importantly, the coach prepares the client to develop connections on his or her own – with family, friends, work colleagues, and members of the community. A client’s sense of connection can change dramatically when given support to join an organization or team, or given encouragement to increase points of contact with a select group of friends.

5. PERSPECTIVE

Over time, with the support of weekly coaching sessions, clients begin to put aside the lens of struggle and frustration and begin to feel more comfortable looking through the lens of their strengths, long term goals, and personal relationships. A client really knows she’s come a long way when she can get a kick out of herself, laugh at her own quirks, and acknowledge her challenges and strengths in the same breath. It would be remiss not to mention how integral humor is to the coaching process. The lighter moments can pack the heaviest punch.

In summary, with AD/HD persisting into adulthood more than 60% of the time, treatment is a long term, continual process most often involving medication, education, lifestyle changes, and support. Hand in hand with medical treatment provided by a practicing psychiatrist, the partnership between a personal coach and a client supports and cements lasting change. In essence, with personal coaching, a little more of the fog clears, and the adult with AD/HD has more capacity to see his or her own capacity, and to take action on designing and living a fulfilling and joyful life.

Jen Zobel Bieber is a certified personal coach in private practice. She has built a reputation helping individuals achieve professional success and personal fulfillment. Jen specializes in working with adults with AD/HD. Learn more at www.JZBcoaching.com.