

4 Ways to Overcome ADHD Challenges and Achieve Your Dreams

Take a cue from these middle-aged women living with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD) -- don't let symptoms like disorganization, forgetfulness, and low self-esteem keep you from making your dreams a reality.

by Sari Solden (excerpted from ADDitude Magazine)

I recently gathered with 80 middle-aged women in New York City for a fun and rewarding day. The event brought laughter, tears, and relief to many of them who finally opened up about a long-held secret. They had spent their lives struggling with organization and low self-esteem at the expense of developing their talents and strengths. While worrying so much about time management and planning, they had scheduled themselves out of their own lives.

Self-Test: Is Your Life on Hold?

Read the statements below and find out.

"Every minute of the day, I am scheduled to do things I am not good at, but I'm trying to be disciplined."

"I feel too guilty to see friends or to take a break from organizing."

"I will start thinking about my own life when everything is under control, everyone's needs are taken care of, and people stop asking me for things."

"If I criticize myself, I will motivate myself. I just need to grow up."

If you've said any of these things, find a different way to measure success. Gauge it not by the things you've checked off your list, but by vitality, authenticity, and connection to what you do.

If you're putting your life on hold -- until your piles of clutter are gone or the laundry is folded, don't. Figure out what you want to achieve, and move toward it. Ahead, find four find four ways to do just that.

Stop Focusing on ADHD Challenges

Joan, a client of mine, managed to do that. After being diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD), in her mid-40s, she met with me in my office. I remember her clutching her planner, her eyes glued to the schedule and calendar. She had divided each day into 15-minute segments that would allow her to tackle her disorganization. Two weeks later, her plan crumbled. She couldn't keep up with it.

Why? Her structured days held nothing that nourished her spirit or enhanced her strengths. Her dreams and yearnings, the things that made her unique, were put on hold until "some day," and she re-doubled her efforts to change who she is.

Arranging Your Life for Health & Happiness

Through therapy she was able to reverse the adult ADD/ADHD negativity that was preventing her from reaching her goals. She gave herself permission to live her life while meeting her challenges with ADHD/ADD head -- on. Eventually, she took a yoga class and joined a choir -- singing had always given her pleasure.

Instead of spending your energy trying to wish your ADD/ADHD challenges away, accept them, and try the following:

Make Friends, Find Mentors

Make friends, in person or online, who have similar challenges. You will be able to see their talents more clearly than they do, and in doing so, you will see your strengths and find support to use them.

Find a person, or mentor, who sees you clearly, values you, and will help you achieve small goals based on your beliefs and your vision for the future. This may be a therapist, an ADD/ADHD coach, a support group member, or a friend.

Spend Time Making Your Dream a Reality

Spending an hour a week on something you value or something pleasurable to you will help you move toward achieving larger life goals.

Find your passion, make your passion happen. At the close of the event in New York, a woman handed me a CD she had just released. On it, she sang a medley of songs, all of which she had written. I remembered her. We had worked together for a while on her struggle to reclaim her life and art. Then she moved away.

Back in Michigan, the next day, I unwrapped the CD and loaded it in my car's player. I heard a woman's evocative voice, singing her own moving songs. My eyes filled with tears. I remembered her disorganization and her ache to get back to what she loved doing, to being herself.

Whether your passion is humor, warmth, or the ability to work with numbers, people, or ideas, when you find yourself putting your life on hold, picture this woman. Ten years ago, she was sitting in a roomful of unfolded laundry, besieged by kids, seeing only her deficiencies. Then she gave herself permission to live, even as she struggled with her biggest ADD/ADHD challenges. You can, too.