

ADHD Boss

By Louise Levin

The current economic climate is promoting a thriving class of entrepreneurial CEO's, sprung from the confines of corporate America to pursue their fortunes in distinctly different, though nonetheless lucrative, venues. The ADHD community will contribute significantly to the population of thriving CEO's in this new economy, as the very nature of their disorder suggests an innate penchant to independence and entrepreneurship—they simply cannot work for other people. ADHD individuals are often endowed with exceptional intellects, able to visualize the “big picture,” and have an invaluable capacity to hyper-focus, especially in moments of creative stimulation. They are also more adept than most at multitasking, and generally capable of delegating tasks to individuals better suited to micro-management. Of course, if an ADHD boss were easy to manage, this article need not be written and you, dear employee, need not read further.

Many books have been written about the way an employee can better manage, or mitigate, the ill effects of an emotionally chaotic CEO or company principle. Though many factors can contribute to a volatile temperament, a better understanding of the quirks peculiar to Attention Deficit Disorder, ADHD, may provide a harried employee with a better understanding of his or her boss' volatility. Understanding, of course, leads to effective management, and an employee who is equipped with the skills to foresee the boss' emotional eruptions may be best suited to forestall them, and to eventually become indispensable to the well-being of the professional dynamic.

Minor frustrations will not vanish upon completion of this article, and any recommendations to overcome the trials of an ADHD boss are easier said than done. Patience, understanding and a high threshold for frustration and perhaps pain, are required for effective management of the ADHD CEO; so, why stay? Because, impatient reader, an ADHD boss' unique personality rewards foresight, initiative and strength, and his or her lack of impulse control may lead to your rapid movement up the ladder and out of the cubicle. By better understanding the symptoms of the disorder, you may determine obstacles *before* hitting the proverbial brick wall, and learn to “work” ADHD to your advantage.

Below, the most common and overt symptoms will be discussed, with recommendations for effective employee management and mitigation of certain disruptive aspects of his or her professional environment. Remember, though your boss' success may lie in his or her fanciful creativity and conception of “out of the box” business solutions, the greatest value that you can provide boss is to take on the role of his or her executive function. You must become the right arm to the head and tether these errant flights of fancy to reality.

Inattention and restless energy. This symptom is most commonly associated with ADHD, and is highly prevalent among men. Your boss may, in the middle of a conversation, stand up and look out the window, shake his or her leg incessantly or intently click their pen to the eventual tune of your frayed nerves. It would be wonderful to say that your boss really is listening to you, that he or she realizes the hours, weeks or months of work you have put towards this grand presentation; really, though, he or she may already have zoned out.

Is your boss just being willfully obstinate and insensitive, or is there a cause for this behavior? Luckily for you, there is a cause, located in the prefrontal lobe of the brain; unluckily for you, there is no cure but patience, brevity and the belief that it's nothing personal, it's just ADHD. Make presentations brief and interactive; by including your CEO in the conversation, even with inane questions, you can insure attention in those precious minutes.

Inattention also affects a principle's completion of long-term company goals and tasks. Though your boss may have engineered the "big picture" with enviable foresight and execution, and though he or she may have instilled similar passion and motivation in you, his or her interest may eventually wane. Perhaps another, equally ambitious idea will take hold, perhaps he or she will abruptly take a vacation, leaving you to pick up the pieces and hope that they fit. Do not allow these actions to shake your confidence; instead, view this moment as an opportunity to prove your managerial powers, and demand advancement accordingly, upon completion of the task.

Lack of Impulse Control Remember the impromptu vacation your boss took in the middle of a long-term project? This and other seemingly erratic and disjointed motivations are directly attributed to an innate lack of impulse control. Remember the prefrontal lobe? It affects this too. Though it may be perceived as a liberating character trait, this ability to transition rapidly from one idea, city or country without much forethought or preparation, can prove infinitely frustrating to an employee who holds organization, deliberation and preparation in high regard. Again, it's nothing personal, it's just ADHD. Be ready to take the reins at a moment's notice, but don't become too enamored of the "yes men" approach when taking on new responsibilities. Tell your boss what can realistically be expected of your management and do not commit too heartily to ambitious deadlines and tasks. Confidence is wonderful, but over confidence, in concert with your boss' fanciful demands and expectations, can lead to excessive stress, self-doubt and, perhaps, failure.

Compromised Executive Function Effective prioritization and execution of basic tasks can go unfinished; an employee may begin to despair of their boss' arrival on time, or at all, to scheduled meetings. In these instances you must, in effect, begin to think a bit like an ADHD individual. Learn to anticipate changes to deadlines, meeting times, or prioritization of tasks. Confirm appointments with your boss ahead of time, or get to know his or her personal secretary really, really well. Though this may seem like an unnecessary sacrifice to your love of order, these minor concessions will promote a boss' confidence in your professional integrity and initiative.

However you choose to deal with your boss' ADHD, you will do well to remember that he or she has not become successful by mere accident, or that the challenges unique to the disorder are not also you're his or her greatest strengths. Your boss may be intolerant of your inability to act as a hyper-professional, or to effectively complement their own shortcomings—of which he or she is very well aware. Success lies in your continued capacity to manage and regulate your boss' errant and often erratic behaviors, and to temper their flights of fancy, however inspiring and creative, with grounded and realistic goals.