

Building Confidence and a Career

When Greg Embser* got a dream job as a web specialist for a Washington, D.C. company this past fall, one of the first things he did was call ADDitude's Coach on Call Sandy Maynard.

After a lifetime of school struggles, Embser was diagnosed with AD/HD during his senior year at Georgetown University. Fortunately, his natural intelligence and drive helped him compensate for his difficulty organizing tasks and meeting deadlines for projects that he found frustrating.

But many with AD/HD who succeed in school suddenly find themselves drowning as responsibilities increase in adulthood. Embser, who somehow "held it together" when life was simpler, worried that he might not be able to keep up with the long list of demands at his new job.

What's more, his first job review was coming up and he was at a complete loss as to how to handle it. "I tend to downplay everything," says Embser, a warm, articulate 27-year-old. "I'm not very good at tooting my own horn and bringing out things that I've done well."

Practice Makes Perfect

Having a hard time talking about what you're good at is a common problem for many people with AD/HD. "These are people who've typically been roughed up by the education system because they do things differently and are told that they're wrong," says Maynard, who has been working with Embser for about seven months. "Those kinds of experiences tend to make individuals less secure about their better qualities."

At the same time, people with AD/HD struggle when they have to talk about things they don't do so well, adds Maynard. After years of being told they're doing things wrong, ADDers can become defensive more easily than their non-ADD counterparts.

To help Embser put himself in the best light during his job review, Maynard conducted a series of interviews with him during which she asked him the 50 most-asked job interview questions.

Knowing what was likely to be asked and rehearsing helped Embser relax and feel more comfortable talking about himself, he says. Embser practiced relaxing, smiling, making eye contact — things that come naturally most people, but which can be a challenge for people with AD/HD. The job review went so well that Embser felt confident enough to apply to business school. He was accepted at Johns Hopkins University's MBA program and started his course work this spring.

Organizing Builds Confidence

Like many smart people, Embser has a good memory — but even people with good memories can get overwhelmed when life gets too hectic. Says Maynard, "Many of my clients have above average intelligence and they use their good memories as their calendar. When it becomes too full, things start dropping through the cracks."

While Embser never carried a calendar, his busy schedule demands a level of organization that requires a date book or electronic organizer, says Maynard. To keep track of things on the fast track, Maynard helped Embser learn to better manage his time and commitments by using an academic calendar. Not having to keep every date and deadline in his head allows him to better focus on other areas that need his attention.

To keep things from falling through the cracks for Embser, Maynard suggested he transfer important deadlines for school into his calendar as soon as he receives the class syllabus, instead of one week at a time. Conversely, she told him to concentrate on his work one week at a time rather than looking too far ahead, which helps him avoid feeling overwhelmed by the magnitude of his tasks.

Since learning how to keep better track of his progress at school and at work, Embser says he's learned to relax and even give himself the occasional pat on the back. "I can actually smile during an interview now without having to remind myself that I need to smile," he says.