

Forward Motion Coaching Newsletter

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Attention Deficit Trait

Writing in the *Harvard Business Review*, Edward Hallowell, a psychiatrist and author of the book "Driven to Distraction," says that executives and managers are being derailed by a new syndrome he calls Attention Deficit *Trait* (ADT), which is characterized by "distractibility, inner frenzy, and impatience."¹

Unlike Attention Deficit *Disorder*, which he explains has a genetic component, ADT develops solely as a consequence of one's environment. It is a symptom of "brain overload," or trying to assimilate and respond to too much information too quickly. Almost all of us know what it's like to speed through the day in a constant state of adrenaline-fueled arousal, answering voice mails, emails, and beepers; checking cell phones and PDAs; rushing to meetings, rushing home, and rushing through dinner.

This pattern is what my father used to call "thrashing around." He'd admonish the offender (usually me or my sister) to "slow down and pay attention to what you're doing." Sage advice because acting from a state of "inner frenzy" causes more mistakes and a *decreased* level of productivity. It also precludes the satisfaction of engaging in thoughtful problem solving and savoring a job well done.

My coaching clients regularly express deep frustration at literally not having time to think because they are bombarded with too many "urgent" demands on their attention (some receive 200 emails *per day*). Is it any wonder that we function on autopilot, disengaged from the work we do and the people we do it with? Or that books about finding purpose, meaning, and passion in life are consistently on the best-seller list?

Hallowell's suggestions for dealing with ADT are not new; rather they echo the common sense ideas found in self-help books and my father's ranting (get enough sleep, break large projects into small steps, take breaks, slow down, etc.). Instinctively, we *know* what we need to do – the problem is motivating ourselves to actually do it!

Which bring us to **April's coaching challenge**: What story do you tell yourself about why you can't slow down, say no to unreasonable demands, turn off the cell phone, or carve out down time? What role do you play in your story -- victim? savior? iron man? Who are the antagonists: the competition ... a boss who is never satisfied ... difficult clients you're afraid to lose? What would happen if you said "no," confronted a boss or colleague, or took some time for yourself?

Next, create a happy ending. Be as specific as possible about your desired outcome and commit yourself to doing just one thing differently to start moving in a new direction. Make the action realistic so that you'll follow through (for example, committing to leave work early on Wednesdays to have dinner with your family).

The key to this exercise is the awareness that the story you tell yourself is just that – a drama, tragedy, comedy, bad musical or horror show that can be re-written so that you get a better part to play.

¹ "Overloaded Circuits: Why Smart People Underperform," by Edward M. Hallowell, published in the January 2005 issue of Harvard Business Review.

Character Development: You may find a correlation between "your story" and the dynamics of your Enneagram personality style, particularly in dealing with stressful situations. You can find more information about the Enneagram on my Web site (www.ForwardMotion.info). Meantime, here's a brief primer on some fears and drivers that can influence the behavior of each type.

Type One individuals worry that they are responsible for doing things right, and that even one mistake could jeopardize an entire project; they want to be above reproach • **Type Two** individuals fear that people won't like them if they say "no" or set limits, so they take on more and more to please others; they want to be needed • **Threes** fear that by slowing down they'll give a competitor the edge; they want to win.

Fours are concerned that they won't be recognized for their creativity and unique presentation; they want to feel special • **Fives** don't want surprises, or to feel powerless against the demands of others; they want independence • **Type Six** individuals fear being blamed for things going wrong, so they make sure that all of their bases are covered; they want certainty and security.

Sevens fear being bored, locked into routines, and deprived of enjoyment; they want to try new things and keep their options open • **Eights** want to control lest they be controlled by someone else; they want sovereignty • **Nines** are uneasy asserting their will and may ignore problems in hopes that they will resolve themselves; they want peace.

Get clear, get focused, and take action! Coaching helps you develop effective strategies for change, eliminate self-defeating behaviors, and step outside your comfort zone. To schedule a complimentary, no obligation coaching session, call 508/835-2482 or email me at ForwardMotion@charter.net.
