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“ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER - WORKPLACE ASSET AND CHALLENGE

Tuesday, September 7th marked the inaugural AD/HD Awareness Day, highlighting the significant impact of Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) on millions of Americans. This awareness effort is being supported by a number of healthcare, education and consumer advocacy organizations including the Attention Deficit Disorder Association (ADDA) and the National Mental Health Association (NMHA). It is estimated that there are 12 to 18 million affected individuals in the U.S. alone.

What is ADD? ADD is a neuro-biological disorder, not a psychological one, which affects people's behavior in various ways. There are two main types - with and without hyperactivity. Research is still seeking the causes and defining symptoms, but current research indicates that ADD is genetically transmitted, or hereditary. Symptoms include chronic distractibility, impulsiveness, "tuning out" when others are talking, a search for high stimulation, and hypersensitivity, according to experts.

ADD is not necessarily a deficit of attention, per se. Rather, it is about attention irregularity and inconsistency. ADD people are frequently of high to very high intelligence and creativity, yet are "wired" differently than the rest. They tend to have a strong aptitude for small business and entrepreneurship, and can be successful in a wide variety of careers. Examples of successful ADD-types include Steven Spielberg, Robin Williams, Thomas Edison, and Winston Churchill.

On the job, workers may exhibit their positive AD/HD assets in the following ways: * thinking of new ways to get things done * high energy and creativity * comfort with ambiguity * ability to be flexible and to adapt quickly to changing situations * highly intuitive * ability to see the "connections" within complex situations * willingness to take risks * naturally think "out of the box" * ability to "read" people and situations with highly accurate insights. Because they are "relaters", they are frequently considered charismatic and may use this to their advantage in their careers and lives.

However, there is a flip side that can challenge or even cripple one's success despite the talents and advantages listed above. For instance, a high-potential sales person, while in their success element with the prospect or client, may struggle with the necessary organizational aspects of the job such as planning the day, following up, monitoring, and submitting paperwork and reports.

Adults with ADD may be challenged with the following characteristics and behaviors according to most ADD experts: Constant trouble getting organized * difficulty in planning ahead * chronic procrastination * fast starts and a lot of projects going at once, with little or poor follow-through * a tendency to become easily bored or restless * easy distractibility (caused by external circumstances or internal thoughts) * low tolerance for structure, rules, or "proper channels" * impulsiveness either in thought, action or words * an unreliable time sense *

ADD and AD/HD have been legally classified as disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). While it is not a company's obligation to recognize and respond to the needs of an ADD adult, once diagnosed by a professional and brought to their attention by an employee, an employer may be able to modify the job or provide support to help build on the positive talents to ensure success in their role.

For more information on ADD and AD/HD, there are many books and web resources available. A good place to start is www.add.org.

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