

Linda Roggli:

It's October, 2020, and even in the midst of a crazy year, it's still ADHD awareness month. And we're still here with TADD talks from ADDA, the Attention Deficit Disorder Association, nine minutes short, pithy soundbites on living with adult ADHD. Stay tuned here it comes.

Casey Dixon:

Hello and welcome to TADD talks with ADDA. I'm Casey Dixon, coach at Dixon Life Coaching. I want to spend a little time today talking about the topic that I will be presenting at the 2020 annual international conference on ADHD, "The Mysterious Paradox of Being a High Achiever with ADHD." I started to investigate this topic because I have so many clients who are really doing quite well in what we would see as traditional adult outcomes. They have PhDs or advanced college degrees. They're married and raising families or doing well in their personal relationships. They're managing their finances fairly well. They're even taking care of their health, although that's always a struggle. So, I sat back one day and I thought to myself, well, how could this be? All the research tells me that ADHD leads to very high risk for negative adult outcomes. So we look at academic achievement.

Casey Dixon:

We say that people with ADHD are more likely to be retained in school. They have a lower educational test scores. They have lower graduation rates for high school and college. Only about 5% to 15%, depending on the research that you're reading, have a four year degree outbound high school, which compared to the 48% in the general population, is a pretty big difference. Fewer than 1% have graduate degrees. So when I look at my clients who are predominantly lawyers and professors with ADHD, it makes me wonder, what is going on here? We also see lower health outcomes and life expectancy for people with ADHD, behavioral and relationship problems, financial problems and occupational problems. That's why a lot of people seek ADHD coaching, that people with ADHD tend to get fired more often - 51% versus 29% in the general population.

Casey Dixon:

So how is it that my clients are coming up with these fairly rosy adult outcomes? That's the mystery. So I said, you know, let's take a look at that. And what I came up with was four basic characteristics that they shared that I think have helped them to become high achievers. The first is that they've really run with their unique talents and interests. High achievers have very strong curiosity and they spend a lot of time and energy in their area of interests, which can be sometimes pretty esoteric. If you look at some of the professors that I work with who are working in sort of bizarre areas, like tropical ecology of Madagascar and Caribbean literature and in weird engineering hydraulics, there's all these sort of very specific areas of interest that drive them. Same with the lawyers that I work with who are working in international law, entertainment law, family law and immigration law, human rights law, they have sort of run with their high interests.

Casey Dixon:

One of the things that you can do is to identify and write down your unique talents and interests and write down kind of what you want to become known for as a professional adult with ADHD. You want to spend more time and energy in those areas rather than the areas that are not really that interesting to you, and that are not in your areas of natural strength, when possible. The second characteristic is that high achievers with ADHD can do well in school. We know that people with ADHD as a group have lower educational attainment, but sometimes school offers routines and structure and support and deadlines and external accountabilities that helps some students with ADHD really thrive. Additionally, I'm going to suggest that people with really high IQs, let's say an IQ of about 120 or more, aren't really showing up in the educational attainment research that we have available to us right now because they tend to get diagnosed later in life.

Casey Dixon:

What research does show us is that highly intelligent people with ADHD can rely on more efficient parts of their brains to make up for their executive function deficits. And this can actually mask the symptoms of ADHD, especially when they're children. So they might be out there doing really well, but they're not really being counted. Some things that you can do is just really be aware that if you are not seeking diagnosis and treatment because you think you might be too high achieving, or you've gone to a doctor and said, I think I might have ADHD. And that person said, hey, you're way too successful to have ADHD. Then you need to know that that's not true. You can have ADHD and be a high achiever at the same time, and getting a diagnosis and treatment will continue to help you with your executive functions.

Casey Dixon:

The third characteristic is that high achievers with ADHD simply work harder. They work weekends and evenings and longer, longer days, and spend a lot more time struggling to get things done. I'm gonna also suggest that this often backfires. It's a very successful approach if you want to get something done, but if it's your only strategy for getting things done when you have ADHD, what often happens is it's not sustainable and you become overwhelmed. So one thing that I think it's really important to do is to list the aspects of your life and work that are worth working really hard on. And list three things that you're currently working really hard on that are not worth your time and energy. And you know, just pay attention to that and see if there's some things that you can cut back on. The fourth characteristic of high achievers with ADHD is that they seek support and treatment.

Casey Dixon:

We know that support and treatment can help alleviate ADHD symptoms for adults. And the people that I work with who are high achieving have gotten that support. It doesn't always mean just medication treatment, but that can certainly be effective. It could also mean cognitive behavioral therapy, group or individual coaching or getting support from friends and families or attending conferences like the one coming up. So one of the things I think can be helpful is to think about the support that's worked for you in the past and see if you need to up it right now. List three areas of your life that would benefit from more support and write down some steps that you can take to get support. People with ADHD are not doomed to negative adult consequences and outcomes. With self-awareness, relying on strengths and interests, embracing your smarts, working hard on the things that matter and getting treatment and other support, people with ADHD can achieve very positive adult outcomes. I happen to know that this is true because I witness it firsthand on a daily basis. And that's, today's TADD talk about "The Mysterious Paradox of Being a High Achiever with ADHD." I'm Casey Dixon. It's been great talking with you today. If you want more information about me or my work with ADHD adults, you can find me online at [www.dixonlifecoaching.com](http://www.dixonlifecoaching.com). That's D-I-X-O-N life coaching.com. And thank you so much for your attention today.

Linda Roggli:

Okay. That's today's ADHD wisdom. Much more to come. And why not join us for the virtual 2020 international ADHD conference coming up in November? [Details@add.org](mailto:Details@add.org). And while you're at it, why not join ADDA? It's a great investment in your ADHD life.