



From executives to students, personal coaches can help with ADHD



Neil Peterson is the founder of the Edge Foundation, which provides coaches to elementary school, middle school, high school, community college and university students.

By Neil Peterson – Contributing writer
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I am guessing that many executives reading this article used what I used to help me succeed in business — an executive coach.

As a businessman and public-sector executive, I always recognized the value of executive coaches. While I eventually found success in my work, I struggled in high school, having trouble reading, staying on task, focusing and following through.

I was lucky during my career to meet weekly with a coach who helped me set and meet goals, discuss priorities and next steps, and help me overcome challenges. The coach didn't tell me what to do, but rather allowed me to think through what I

needed to do to develop my own strategies and solutions and steps that I wouldn't do myself. A coach helped me think through what I was doing, why I was doing it and what I would do in the future. It's unbelievably helpful and makes me much more productive and more effective.

As a child I was never diagnosed with anything or had a label placed upon me. Then, when my two children were in their teens, both were diagnosed with ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder). I learned from the doctor that it was hereditary and realized I must have it too because I had seen my children struggle with many of the same challenges I faced.

It's widely understood that about one in five individuals have learning and attention issues and struggle to get through school and make their way into the job market.

ADHD presents unique hurdles to those who have it — from problems in school and poor grades to difficulties with time-management, lack of focus and impulsivity. They're not unintelligent or lazy. Rather, their executive functioning skills — the ability to plan, prioritize, follow through, adjust to setbacks and persevere — are not developed. We have learned from working in inner city schools that youth who have had Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) or childhood trauma have the same kind of brain chemistry issues as those with ADHD. They have tremendous talents, but many need some help.

My children and I have found the top way to help with our ADHD is to work with a personal coach — just like I did in the corporate world. I believe that is the key to helping the 20 percent of us who have learning and attention issues become successful, productive workers. Coaching uniquely contributes directly to improved academic performance, enhanced social functioning, and increased self-esteem. It not only helps students and CEOs, but can help all employees struggling with executive functioning challenges.

I'm not the first or only one to believe that. Former Google Executive Chairman Eric Schmidt told Fortune that the best advice he ever received was, "Have a coach."

When Google board member John Doerr suggested he get a coach, Schmidt questioned him. "Why would I need a coach? Is something wrong? He said 'No ... Everybody needs a coach ... Every famous athlete, every famous performer has somebody who's a coach, somebody who can watch what they're doing ... They can give the perspective.' ... A coach really, really helps."

I recently heard Washington State University President Kirk Schulz lament the fact that only 42 percent of the 25,000 students at WSU graduate in four years and only 67 percent of WSU students graduate in six years. WSU is not an outlier — and actually outperforms the national average six-year college graduation rate of 59 percent. Meanwhile, almost 20,000 Washington state high school seniors — 20 percent — did not graduate this year. Thousands of students are not completing the diplomas and degrees that will get them good jobs.

If a tool used by executives could help 20 percent of the population afflicted with these challenges, it's worth considering for students who struggle, as well.