

How to Actually Get Things Done

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Quick fixes fail quickly.

Meaningful improvement takes effort and time.

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ADHD is not a disorder of knowing
what to do. It's a disorder of doing what
you know.

Russell Barkley, PhD

ADHD & Time
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Willpower is really important.

But never enough.

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Work It From Every Angle

- Performance is multi-determined
 - What exactly is getting in your way—in *this* situation?
 - Pull as many levers as you can—it all adds up
 - Some improvement is probably helpful, but how much do you need?
- Manage the social impacts of whatever remains
 - How much of the problem is others' expectations or interpretations?
- Goal is to strengthen agency and self-esteem

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“Alarms don’t work for me, because I just turn them off and then don’t do it.”

Or to do list, schedule, fancy app, whiteboard. . .

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Planning AND Awareness AND Motivation

- Is the problem:
 - Planning: knowing *what* needs to be done *when*
 - Awareness: knowing what needs to be done *in that moment*
 - Motivation: feeling the *drive* to do it
- First, get clear on what is getting in the way
 - "A problem well defined is a problem half solved."
- Then, match the solutions to the problem

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Set a Better Foundation

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Fill the Tank

- ADHD makes it harder to do a good job on sleep, diet, and exercise
 - Which makes it harder to overcome your ADHD
 - And takes much more force of will to power through
- Today's productivity began last night in bed
 - Or last week at the grocery store

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Medication helps people with ADHD
do what they know.

Unfortunately, strategies only work when you use
them.
(And alternatives aren't treatments.)

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Look For It

- Actively look for and give yourself credit for the effort that you
are putting in
 - On the same old stuff
 - On the improvements you're working on
 - . . . Because outcomes sometimes involve things we can't control
- Actively look for and give yourself credit for resilient
recoveries
 - And lessons learned (and then applied)

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Build Your Cheering Section

- We all need a little help from our friends
 - Honesty and vulnerability, without fear of judgment
 - Do they see your hard work? And cheer it on?
- Find the people who will support you—the successes and the
failures
 - Earn it
 - Expect it
 - Give it

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Clarify Your Goals

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Get Clear on Your Priorities

- What are you working towards?
 - Why is this goal important to you?
 - How does this one task relate to bigger goals?
- How do competing goals rank relative to each other?
 - Relative value, not absolute value
- What is your North star in this moment?
 - How can you keep that front and center?

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Dump the Duds

- If you never get to or finish a task, maybe there's a good reason why
 - Procrastination = your present self doesn't want to do it but your future self wants it to have been done
 - Not a priority = your present self doesn't want to do it and your future self doesn't care enough
- Is this actually someone else's goal?
 - Would it be wise or generous to find a way to do it anyway?
- False goals use up mental energy

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Do You Actually Have Time?

- Many tasks are doable in theory
 - Except for all those other tasks. . .
- Before agreeing, pause to actually determine if you have the time—and even want to do it
 - This requires being aware of other demands and constraints
 - This also requires doing the mental work to figure it out
- If necessary, add some uncertainty to the doing or timing
 - If so, who checks in with who?

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Clear the Dead Wood

- To do lists easily become graveyards of failed hopes
 - Should this task even get written down?
 - The clutter hides the worthy tasks—net negative
- To do lists are living documents
 - Some tasks were once fine ideas, but no longer are
 - Make it survival of the fittest by only keeping the worthy
 - If necessary, create a second aspirational list
- These decisions require pausing to consider the big picture

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Use Your Tools Well

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Let Go of the Fantasy of the Magic Bullet

- There is no magic alarm, to-do list, or schedule app
 - They may increase planning and awareness, but not motivation
- Create a good enough system and then just use it
 - Don't let perfecting the system become its own distraction
- Every time you use these tools is better than a time that you don't
 - How do you let yourself off the hook of using them?

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Don't Spend Gold on Garbage

- When are you most productive?
 - Times of day?
 - Situations?
 - After a good night's sleep and workout?
- Plan the most cognitively demanding work for those most productive times and blocks
 - Protect this sacred time
 - And keep the simplistic tasks for low brain power times

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Schedules: What When

- It's hard to do the right thing at the right time if you don't know what you're supposed to be doing now
- The more you use a schedule system, the better it works
 - It's an aid to achieving *your* goals
 - Even partial usage leads to tangible benefits
 - Every time you look at the schedule is a quick reminder
 - Add useful notes to the appointment

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Put To-Dos on Your Schedule

- To-do list items can sit there forever
 - "Is *now* the time to work on that?"
- So make tasks time-specific (and more likely to be completed) by putting them into your schedule
 - Especially helpful for tasks with time constraints
 - It isn't a blood oath—tasks can be moved
 - Also makes time more visible as your schedule fills up
 - You still need to create the motivation in the moment

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Are You Setting Up Later Trouble?

- We can preemptively let ourselves off the hook by earlier actions or inactions
 - Tilts the odds of what happens later (and we know it)
- Is there something about the avoided task that makes you uncomfortable?
 - Is it worth really deciding what you want to do here?
 - Do you need to remind yourself of *why* you're doing this?
 - Do you need to approach this differently?

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Create a Good Workspace

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ADHD is all about *performance*.
Therefore, solutions are all about the
point of performance.

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Managing ADHD is Managing Your Environment

- ADHD makes it harder to resist distractions and temptations—less response inhibition
 - Every ping on your attention burns up some willpower
 - There's more of a roll of the dice
- Rather than over-relying on internally resisting distractions, it's more effective to tweak the external environment
 - Make distractions less frequent, noisy, interesting, intense, close

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Kill the Competition

- Manage attention well as a foundation for managing time well
- Create a good work environment
 - Think about signal to noise ratio
- Block/eliminate distractions so you're more likely to stay on track
 - Every ping on your attention burns up some willpower
 - And rolls the dice

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Beware of Sticky and Slippery Activities

- Some activities are sticky
 - Too easy to get stuck on them (hyperfocus)
- Some activities are slippery
 - Too easy to slip off onto other activities (distractibility)
- Once in one of these, it's much harder to bring attention back
 - The point of intervention is before starting—don't pretend otherwise
 - Be intentional about what you start and when

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Do You Need an Internet Blocker?

- The proof is in the pudding—how's it working out?
- Blockers/limiters reduce the time spent online
 - Total time or specific to each platform
 - Or create black-out times
- If you spend too much time online but resist using a blocker, then you need to ask yourself why
 - What is your goal and what are you willing to do to get there?

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Clear the Piles

- It's tempting to keep stuff just in case
 - Move too quickly to next task, but also may not know big picture
 - "Clutter is deferred decisions," so decide now
- There's a cost in not finding what you actually need
 - And it's just distracting and breaks the flow
- How likely are you to actually need this?
 - Decide quickly, without over-thinking

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Streamline Processes, Eliminate Off-Ramps

- Those with ADHD are more likely to get distracted and derailed
 - Every bump, ping, friction point, and extra step is a chance to get off task
- As much as possible, streamline processes and minimize transitions
 - Less painful to do the task
 - Less likely to get off task

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Get into a Productive Mindset

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Ambiguity: Clarify the Unclear

- Do ask, do tell
 - If you're not sure what to do, who can you ask?
 - Will it save you more time than figuring it out yourself?
 - And will your not knowing even be a secret if you don't ask?
- Be willing to flounder around and have faith in the process
 - Perhaps with something of an intentional plan—or not
 - Bite the bullet on some choice point decisions
 - Accept the cognitive and emotional work

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Stop Lying to Yourself

- What are your favorite lies?
 - I don't have to write that down—I'll remember it
 - This will only take a minute
 - I will be more productive after I . . .
- Keep an eye out for your biggest temptations
 - If you had to bet \$1000, would you bet for or against this optimism?
- Do what you want, just be honest about it

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Do What You Hate

- It's tempting to conveniently avoid what you don't want to do
 - This tempts trouble—and guarantees a guilty conscience
- Make it a regular habit to do these dreaded tasks—actually plan where and when
 - It's more likely to happen if you plan it for earlier in the day
 - What small reward might tilt the odds?
 - Take a moment to give yourself credit—and counteract the old guilt

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Is That Actually Worth Doing Now?

- **Procrastivity**—doing marginally productive tasks as a justification for procrastinating on more cognitively or emotionally demanding tasks
- What are your favorite procrastivity tasks?
 - Look for the times when you feel yourself sliding into them
 - Is this really the thing I should be doing now?
 - Am I doing this or not doing something else?

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Honor the (Real) Deadline

- Soft deadlines are demotivating—especially with ADHD
 - Do you preemptively let yourself off the hook by intentionally creating soft deadlines?
 - Including bedtime
- If it's someone else's deadline, clarify the real time
 - If you don't believe it or can't do it, then talk about it (soon)
- Notice how soft deadlines lead to lots of creep
 - What is the final price paid?

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How Much Should Others Get to Vote?

- Everyone has opinions, but who should be allowed to vote on your level of productivity?
 - To what extent does your productivity have a direct impact on them?
 - Are you equals or do they have more power?
- Equals need to negotiate in a way that balances productivity and the relationship
 - Or is intentional about imbalanced situations

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Disappoint Early

- ADHD makes it easy to over-promise
- Avoid false agreements
 - Get clear on whether you are willing and able to do the task on the requested time frame
 - Be willing to tolerate the other person's reaction if it's no—without praying for a miracle
- Disappointing early gives the other person more time to adjust
 - Or try to convince you

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How can you make success more likely?

Not perfect, just better

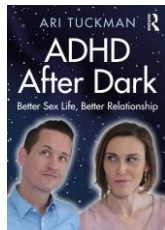
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