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EXECUTIVE LIFE  
Attention Deficit Is in the Office, Too  
By ANNE FIELD

Two years ago, Andrew Hearn felt as if he was going nowhere fast. He was 45 but couldn't hold down a full-time job in his field, social work, instead doing part-time stints at Planned Parenthood of New York City and Beth Israel Medical Center.

Mr. Hearn knew that something was wrong, but he didn't know what. So he sought help from an executive coach, and it didn't take her long to figure out the problem. She asked him if he had been tested for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

He hadn't. So he took the test and learned that he had the disorder. He began taking Adderall, used for treating A.D.H.D., and almost immediately could focus better and organize his day more efficiently. Though his symptoms  $\frac{1}{2}$  trouble meeting deadlines, a tendency to become distracted and to jump from project to project  $\frac{1}{2}$  didn't disappear, he learned some basic tricks to keep them under control. He could hold shorter meetings, for example, or break down projects into steps.

Last January, Mr. Hearn was promoted to director of social services at Planned Parenthood of New York City. His salary  $\frac{1}{2}$  and his self-confidence  $\frac{1}{2}$  shot up, and for the first time, he set up a 401(k) retirement account. "I now know how to deal with the problem and live with it," he said. "And at the end of every day, I'm able to accomplish so much more than ever before."

About 3 percent to 5 percent of all adults have the disorder, estimates Kevin Murphy, associate professor of psychiatry and chief adult A.D.H.D. clinician at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in Worcester. The condition, also known as just A.D.D., for attention deficit disorder, is a malfunctioning of the part of the brain that governs self-control, concentration and planning.

While the disorder can hamper anyone's job performance, it is a potential career killer for managers, who must struggle to complete tasks that colleagues can breeze through. Their energy and creativity are "enormous assets," said Dr. Edward Hallowell, clinical instructor of psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School and founder of the Hallowell Center for Cognitive and Emotional Health in Sudbury, Mass. "But in corporations, they get into trouble by being late, by offending people with their shoot-from-the-hip style and by their impulsiveness."

For some executives, the answer is to seek help not in psychotherapy but in the practical advice of executive coaches. An increasing number of coaches are specializing in A.D.H.D., and many have become more adept at recognizing its manifestations. About a half-dozen organizations, including the American Coaching Association in Lafayette Hill, Pa., and the ADD Coach Academy in Slingerlands, N.Y., provide such training to coaches.

"We've seen a substantial growth in the number of A.D.D. coaches and businesspeople seeking help," said Dan Martinage, executive director of the International Coach Federation in Washington. The increase has come even though most executives hide their condition, fearing that it will be perceived as a weakness.

What makes them go for help? Sometimes a spouse or trusted employee prods them, or they just "have the feeling that something is missing," said Nancy Ratey, a coach in Wellesley, Mass., and the president

of the Attention Deficit Disorder Association. One of her clients, the chief executive of an insurance company in the Midwest, sought her out at the urging of his family.

His symptoms were classic. He would change appointments without telling his assistants, lose files, run meetings without an agenda, jump from topic to topic and generally leave everyone in confusion. "It was like trying to lasso an amoeba," Ms. Ratey said. But his condition was treatable. Ms. Ratey followed him around for three days, interviewing people including his chauffeur and his secretary, then made recommendations. Each morning, for example, his assistant would hand him one file at a time, discussing what needed to be done and taking notes. Only after they had finished with one folder would she hand him the next. The chief executive also moved his top executives' offices closer to his own, so he would have fewer distractions on his way to talk to them.

Difficulty in concentrating is probably the most troublesome symptom for executives and is the focus of most coaching. Pamela Redmond, executive director for finance operations at Anthem Inc., an insurance company in Columbus, Ohio, is a case in point.

Ms. Redmond, 46, had managed to succeed in her job despite her lifelong pattern of being easily distracted and her difficulty juggling multiple assignments. But there was a cost. "For years, I'd watch other people leaving at 6, and I'd be there till 9, 10 at night," she said. "I just wasn't able to focus." Thirty people reported to her, and she had meetings throughout the day.

Ms. Redmond suspected that she had A.D.H.D., though she didn't take a diagnostic test. Instead, a year ago, she sought help from Barbara McCrae, a coach in Colorado Springs. In weekly phone sessions  $\frac{1}{2}$  executive coaching is often done on the phone  $\frac{1}{2}$  the two zeroed in on ways to bolster her organizational skills. For example, she learned how to make a to-do list that wasn't "just 100 things I needed to get done," she said. She learned techniques for figuring out which two or three tasks were the most important and started keeping a journal about her goals. Today, she says, she leaves the office around 7, even during her busiest season.

Coaching techniques vary. A daily nagging session works for a 54-year-old Massachusetts executive who requested anonymity. For the past year, his coach has been making 10-minute calls every morning at 8 to go over the previous day's accomplishments and the goals for that day.

"It's all about time management," said the executive, who recently left his old job as the principal of a consulting firm to become director of policy for a state agency.

Executives can learn a variety of on-the-job strategies, but the most important coping mechanism is finding good office help, coaches say.