

SUCCESS STORIES:

Jack's Journey

By Suzy Wilkoff

A client of mine, whom I will call “Jack,” graduated from college on May 16, 2015.

Jack's major “challenge” is his ADHD. Additionally, he is bipolar and takes medication. He sees a psychiatrist and a dialectical behavioral therapist.

His mother enlisted my services when he was living at a halfway house. When we began, Jack had dropped out of two colleges and had difficulty focusing, prioritizing, and following through.

I drafted agendas for our meetings. The main categories included were:

- Regular Weekly Schedule
- Additional Errands and Personal Appointments
- Files and Paperwork
- Career and Goals

We picked out and assembled a new desk together and created a user-friendly filing system. It was imperative that he could find receipts and documents, and we kept his medical, personal, and Alcoholics Anonymous papers in an easy-to-carry accordion box with a handle, separate from his rolling file cart, which held everything else.

My focus when creating these systems was always on Jack and how he would find things, so he named most everything. Occasionally, I made suggestions on how documents could be consolidated into one category rather than creating many specific ones. Jack and I purged his files twice per year.

Jack worked as a babysitter and at an assisted living center in the activities department. We drafted a résumé and through the years continued to update it.

We discussed his return to college. With his parents' blessing, we visited Lynn University, which offers the Institute for Achievement and Learning for students with challenges, who need tutoring and other tools to ease their college experiences.

Eventually, he moved from the halfway house to a “conventional”

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house with roommates. None were students, so study at home was difficult, and we agreed that the library on campus was the best venue.

Those who work with ADHD clients understand that the concept of time to them is often “now” or “not now.” This made prioritizing and completing schoolwork daunting.

Jack is intelligent and creative. Acting, filmmaking, photography, and drawing were his favorite classes. He easily accomplished assignments in those subjects. However, it was apparent that, although not dyslexic, he did not like to read textbooks.

We broke reading assignments into 30-minute increments, setting goals for completing chapters and using highlighters. If not covered in the syllabi, I recommended he ask professors how much of the exams came from books and how much was taken from class lectures.

At the beginning of each semester, he consolidated all important dates (tests, projects, presentations, and exams) from each of the syllabi into his iPhone calendar. He used alarms widely.

We prepared an old-fashioned block calendar of a full, seven-day week as a visual aid (on paper) to indicate what dates and times he had classes. That way, he saw that if there were three classes on a Tuesday, he should not schedule many personal appointments that day.

His to-do list was originally separated by school and personal tasks, but eventually he preferred listing all items together. An important strategy was deciding whether to draft the list in his iPhone or on paper. We tried both; in the end, the iPhone won.

If he needed a break from schoolwork, I recommended looking at housework, exercise, or grocery

shopping as a diversion, rather than an unpleasant task.

Accountability was important. He was accountable to himself, his parents, his professors, and me. We weren't going to let him fail, and he was determined to succeed.

Clarifying the difference between goals and deadlines was helpful. Exams were deadlines because they happened on specific dates. Jack was always the one to take the lead in group projects, but delegation was difficult with his peers. For fellow students not holding their weight, Jack attempted to set deadlines for their contributions.

We created a document with one list for areas he was doing well in and another list for what he needed improvement on. We reviewed it so we could continue honing his organizational and time “demand” management skills.

Jack has worked hard to develop better practices, and although there may be future challenges with procrastination and prioritization, he understands the consequences of how

those affect not only him, but also those around him.

At the age of 26, Jack has finally graduated from college; I had the pleasure of attending the graduation ceremony with his family. At the date of this writing, he hadn't heard yet whether he will be accepted to Lynn's graduate school, but all bets are on him.

Editor's Note: This is a prototype for a new column we're considering called “Success Stories,” which would highlight significant accomplishments by our CD clients, especially those facing notable life challenges. E-mail me at editor@challengingdisorganization.org and let me know what you think of the column. Would you like to see more stories like this? Do you have client successes you'd like to share? I welcome your feedback. Thanks!

— Emily Wilska, *Chronical Editor*

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