

# ADA accommodations for ADD/ADHD executive assistant?

**Question:** I know someone posted earlier about having a boss with ADD/ADHD. What about when the person diagnosed with ADD/ADHD (combined inattentive/hyperactive type) is the executive assistant herself?

I would be interested in knowing what employer-provided (under the ADA) accommodations have helped other admins with this disorder to do their jobs better/more effectively.

Our responsibilities as admins are often focused on being able to multi-task, keep organized, prioritize, remain on time with projects, remember names/phone numbers, and keep focused ... all of which have to happen simultaneously, sometimes. All of these are significant challenges for someone with the disorder and who has issues with short-term memory, keeping track of time, finding/organizing files and remembering information after being distracted by someone/something else, etc. -- *Anonymous*

## Comments

I can't imagine someone with ADD/ADHD entering the field of assistant, much less ever making it to the level of Executive Assistant. At the least, I wouldn't think that such a job would be of interest.

However, you bring up a very interesting question. Should the ADA require employers to accommodate a condition that is not conducive to the requirements of the job? I'll make an extreme example - should accommodations be made for a blind man to be a security guard?

**Posted by: EA in CA | July 07, 2006 at 01:04 PM**

This is what I would recommend:

1. Rely heavily on your Outlook Calendar to remind you when something is due. Set it so that it pings you with enough time in advance to get it done.
2. Write EVERYTHING down. Don't assume you will remember it. In fact respond to folks via email instead of in person. That way you can always look back on what you said.
3. Keep a cheat sheet of phone numbers nearby. Don't beat yourself up for not remembering them.
4. Write notes to yourself and keep them where you will reread them.
5. As far as organizing/finding files - set them up in such a logical way that anyone off the street could find them.

**Posted by: | July 07, 2006 at 01:04 PM**

I am sorry but I find EA in CAs comment very offensive. I have ADD and my boss didn't even know about it until I

had worked for her for almost a year and I told her about it. I take medication every day to help me with this and the only thing that I struggle with is that it takes me a little longer than others to complete some tasks. I think that you will find that there are many assistants in the world that struggle with some kind of learning disorder and are very successful in what they do. Also most of the time people that have ADD or ADHD have a hard time paying attention, couldn't this be a problem with just about any job?

**Posted by: | July 07, 2006 at 01:11 PM**

I agree with the person who did the last posting. Just because you have a "handicap" doesn't mean you can't do the job. I'm deaf and wear two hearing aids but was the recording secretary to my City's planning commission for 15 years before getting a promotion to Administrative Assistant. I know my limitations, but also know how to compensate for those limitations. There are medications that can be used for ADD/ADHD, and the person in the second posting has some excellent ideas. "Handicaps" are only what you allow them to be.

**Posted by: Courtney L | July 07, 2006 at 01:24 PM**

If you have Outlook or a similar program, use it extensively. Block time by scheduling "meetings" with yourself. Use task reminders (I love the "recurring task" feature - I use it a lot, even for mundane things like reminding me to open the mail or start the dishwasher).

As one of the other posters mentioned, write everything down! Keep a master list of all tasks (whether electronic or paper). Don't expect yourself to remember everything - I have so many things coming at me at once that I learned to write them down.

When you get interrupted, try not to let it get you off track. Write down on your "to do" list whatever it is someone asks you to do, then get right back to the thing you were originally working on.

Finally, if someone asks you to do something when you're away from your desk (and you can't write it down on your list right away), ask them to e-mail you with the question or request. It may seem silly, but you're likely to be interrupted several times before you get back to your desk, and this puts the burden back on the other person to send you a reminder e-mail.

**Posted by: Lisa | July 07, 2006 at 01:40 PM**

I think if you do it right and take it seriously, being an Exec Admin is a tough job no matter whether you have ADD/ADHD or anything else! You're expected to never forget, never misplace, never misdirect, never do anything except fly under the radar and take care of things. No wonder they have Admin Pro Week every year!

I keep an online To Do list with a comments column. Everything I need to do goes on that list no matter how big or small. When it is complete, I delete that row. I use highlighting to mark anything that is urgent or needs special attention. I never assume I will remember anything! Too many distractions to take that risk.

**Posted by: | July 07, 2006 at 01:43 PM**

Don't worry, EA in CA. Your comments weren't offensive. Those are questions that came to mind for me, as well. There are completely legitimate concerns when someone applies for a job and on the surface it seems there is a

physical or mental handicap that may impair their performance.

I also think that no one has really focused on the initial question posted: What can the EMPLOYER do (or what should it do) to accommodate someone in this kind of position with this kind of challenge? I have no answer, but I'd be interested in hearing one. And BTW, thanks for the tip on using the Task recurring thing!

**Posted by: Anonymous | July 07, 2006 at 02:01 PM**

I didn't necessarily find the comments from EA in CA to be offensive; somewhat derogatory and uninformed perhaps.

I will state that I personally find being an EA to be the perfect job because there is a lot of quick action taking place and therefore I do not have enough downtime to get distracted. I work for a very large global company, have ADHD, do not take meds, and have supported my boss - the Company's Chief Operating Officer - very successfully for over 5 years. Our CFO's assistant has ADD/ADHD and is also extremely efficient and well respected.

I guarantee there are many successful EAs that are ADD/ADHD...we just don't walk around with labels on our foreheads. As Courtney L. says, "I know my limitations, but also know how to compensate for my limitations." Well said, Courtney!

**Posted by: Niki | July 07, 2006 at 04:23 PM**

While somewhat off the topic, my son has ADD with a mild form of dyslexia. The main thing a person can do is educate themselves. I have learned so much over the last six years and continue to learn more. He's learning to cope much better with things as we go along. He's enrolled in a Study Skills class at school this year. If something like this is available, take it, educate yourself. I remind his teachers every year that he may take a different route than others to get something done. However, that different route makes him all that more special because he makes the rest of us look at things differently. It's been a wonderful, and eye-opening, experience in seeing him grow and learn. It wasn't easy as some people are set in their ways. But remember the key word - education. People can learn and accept. Good luck.

**Posted by: MB | July 12, 2006 at 12:03 PM**

IMHO, to a point, I don't think it's the employers position to help accommodate someone with ADD/ADHD in an EA position. I think, as a person with ADHD herself, I try to work with my negatives and make them positive. I know my psychologist said this is actually a perfect job for someone with ADHD as doing things differently constantly and needing to do things now, and finish up now, are more productive for someone with ADHD, versus someone who likes constant routine and no stress.

For the original poster, I highly suggest you start to figure out how you can work with your ADD. I use a ton of post-its, always have a notepad when I talk to my boss, always write messages down immediately and deliver them immediately, etc.

THEN, if there are still things that you can't do, I would talk to your boss about it. Especially if it's things maybe THEY can adjust to make it better for you.

As for the ADA laws, I'm not sure, so I'm not addressing that. Good luck. I know it's not easy, however, actually

being an EA is a job better suited to someone with ADHD, then someone that needs constant structure.

**Posted by: | July 12, 2006 at 12:47 PM**

It has been quite a few years since I have had to seek employment, but I do remember a question that was asked on most of the employment applications. "Do you have any physical or mental conditions that would hinder your ability to perform this job?"...or something like that. If the person answered "Yes" and the employer hired them anyway, or, they were diagnosed with the disorder after being hired, I would think the employer should make accommodations for the employee.

**Posted by: | July 14, 2006 at 02:26 PM**