

Engineering Around ADHD

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Intended audience

1. People with ADHD
2. Coworkers
3. Managers

Details I can't cover in 12 minutes

1. **Diagnosis and medication:**

Talk to an **adult** ADHD specialist

2. **Legal protections:**

Read up on the ADA

Talk to HR, or a lawyer

4.4%

of the US adult population

Symptoms, by the stereotypes

1970s: School-age boys who won't sit still

1980s: School-age boys who won't pay attention

1990s: The adult men those boys grew into

2000s: Wait... girls and women can have this too?

Yes. Yes we can.

Symptoms, by the DSM-5 criteria

1. **Hyperactivity:** fidgeting, talking too much...
2. **Impulsivity:** impatience, snap decisions...
3. **Inattention:** poor time management, procrastination, lack of follow-through, difficulty multitasking, organization & memory issues...

“You just need more self-control.”

**ADHD is a neurological issue,
not a moral failing.**

What are executive functions?

- Hiring
- Firing
- Wearing a suit
- Writing the inevitable “Our Incredible Journey” post on Medium when the company gets acquired



What are executive functions?

- Control of attention
- Switching tasks
- Self-inhibition
- Working memory



What do I need executive functions for?

- New sequences of actions
- Overriding habits
- Prioritization
- Troubleshooting
- Technically difficult situations



What do I need executive functions for?

- Building new things
- Best practices
- Planning
- Debugging
- Everything we do

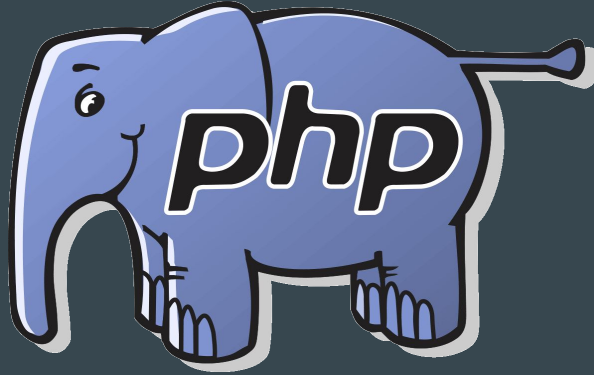


That sounds bad. How do we deal?

Treat it like a tech problem.

Treat it like a tech problem

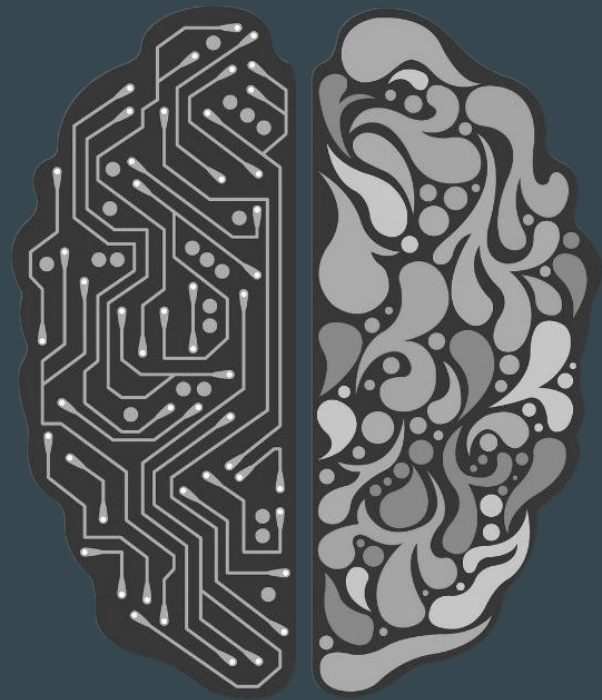
We've all dealt with tech that's a little... quirky.



Treat it like a tech problem

- Buggy scheduler?
- Restricted memory?
- Limited interrupts?
- Expensive context switches?

There are always workarounds.

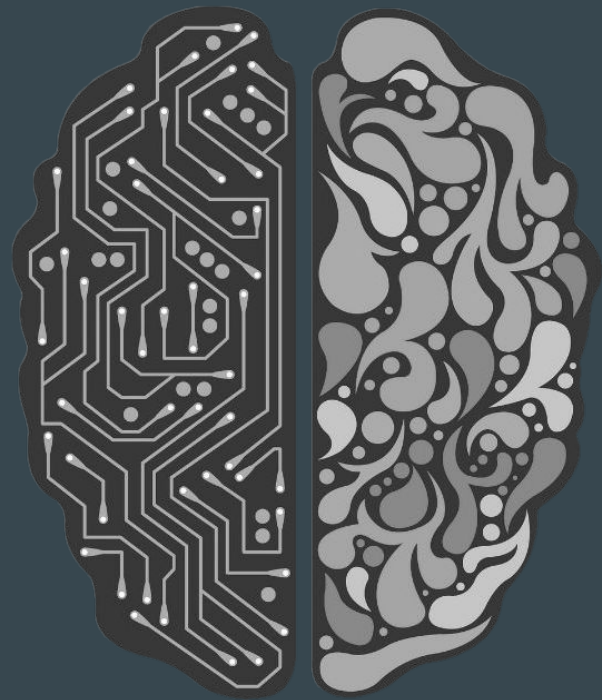


Treat it like a tech problem

Save your executive functions
for where you really need them.

Offload everything you can to:

- Technology
- Rote processes
- Other people



Workarounds for control of attention

Stop the interrupts!

- Turn off popups
- Mute IM channels
- Filter your email
- Put your headphones on



Replace interrupts with polling

Workarounds for control of attention

One weird trick for staying in the zone:

“Hey, can you take a look at...”

“Sure. Put it in JIRA.”

Get it in writing.

Workarounds for working memory

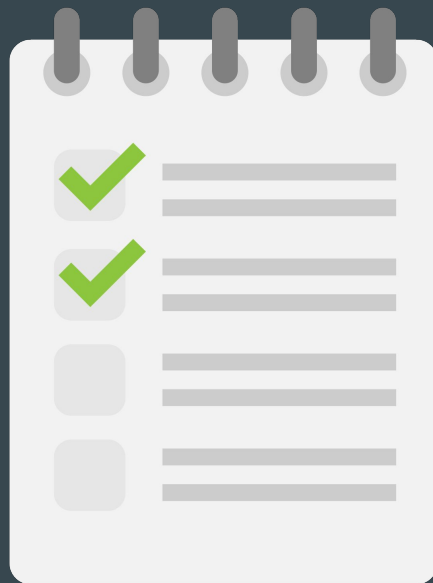
Your bug tracker is your new best friend.

- Can update people so you don't have to
- Store links to design docs, API docs, PRs, other bugs
- Store your work notes
 - Dump your brain here at the end of the day
- Store your plans...

Workarounds for working memory

Checklists!

- Separate planning from action
- Don't remember things that your computer can
- Doctors and pilots use them
- Feels good to check items off
- Next step: automation



Workarounds for task switching

Separate planning from action.

Literally, if you have to.

Work in a different corner.

Pick a specific time of day.

These are two very different headspaces.



Workarounds for task switching & self-inhibition

Can't start?

Got stuck?

Not quite finished?

Find a buddy.



Are there **any** upsides?

Sort of.

Are there any upsides?

- Creativity: The flip side of impulsivity
- Different filters
 - You'll see annoyances that other people filter out: repetitive operations, UX hiccups, slow performance
- Hyperfocus
 - Can exceed neurotypical performance on inherently interesting tasks, or under high stress

Thank you.