

PASSION TO PURPOSE:

ADHD Coach Helps People Flip Perspective

By Kathryn Eftink. 11/2/2023

He didn't know why he was different from others. He couldn't find the missing piece to his puzzle. The puzzle was his brain.

Why did he go through 11 corporate jobs in 22 years? Why did his brain move faster than those around him? Why did everything get so boring so fast?

At age 47, Stuart Cohen found the answer. He was diagnosed with ADHD.

"I like to say that the mystery of me was solved," Cohen said.

Now, at 59, he found his purpose as an ADHD life coach, and he used what he learned to help others understand themselves. He was the person he never had.

ADHD or attention deficit/ hyperactivity disorder is one of the most common neurodevelopment disorders in childhood, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Cohen described it as having a difference in the brain. This difference made it difficult for people with ADHD to control behavior.

"It's like having a Ferrari brain with bicycle brakes," he said.

But as Cohen grew up, the disorder was less common and harder to recognize.

It wasn't until 1968 that The American Psychiatric Association formally recognized ADHD as a mental disorder, according to WebMD. At the time, five years before Cohen was born. It was called hyperkinetic reaction to childhood.

ADHD was too unknown for Cohen's teachers to see since he wasn't the hyperactive type. He was the inattentive type. He often spent his class time daydreaming or doodling.

Inattentive learners don't have behavioral issues, but they do have trouble completing tasks, said Belle McKinney, a middle school teacher in Desoto County. She has worked with kids with ADHD for 13 years.

"Their auditory listening skills are almost nonexistent," McKinney said.

Since Cohen didn't have any behavioral issues and he got good grades, his mother didn't think much about his daydreaming.

"To her, I was always Stuart," he said.

After Cohen graduated from college, he worked in the travel and hospitality industry for 22 years. He had 11 jobs during that time. Half of them he left because he was bored. The other half asked him to leave.

"I could laugh about it now," Cohen said. "But I was really ashamed."

When Cohen was 47, a woman he was dating, Kimberly, a nurse practitioner, asked him if he'd ever been tested for ADHD. Her twins had ADHD, and she noticed similarities between Cohen and her children. The lightbulb above Cohen's head began to spark. She said he should get tested.

Cohen's test proved her hypothesis. He had ADHD, and the doctor prescribed him medication.

During the 22 years Cohen worked in travel and hospitality, he had speaking gigs every week. He had a podcast. Cohen found his passion, but eventually, the spark began to fade.

Cohen's last 14 years in travel and hospitality bored him. He was frustrated.

"I was like, I need a higher purpose, man," Cohen said. "I'm getting burned out... What's next? You know?"

The medicine prescribed wasn't giving him the answers he needed, so he reflected and decided to go on a silent retreat.

A silent retreat?

The thought of going on a silent retreat was hilarious to him. Cohen is a talker, so he laughed at the idea, but he went. He sat there with a notebook, by himself, and just wrote.

"I just sort of exploded on the paper," Cohen said. "It kept coming back to ADHD."

That's when he realized he needed to learn more about himself and his diagnosis. The answer can't just be in one "magic pill," he thought to himself. So, in 2020, he enrolled in a program that would train him to become a certified ADHD coach.

"In the process of learning about me, can I help others?" Cohen said.

The lightbulb above his head lit up again. He found his purpose, but Cohen was not the only one searching for that light.

Payton Hinson, 21, was diagnosed with ADHD at 18. Her mystery was solved. Like Cohen, Hinson was the inattentive/ distractible type and finding the right medication was difficult.

"I'm literally still trying to figure out if immediate release or extended release is right for me," Hinson said.

She was in therapy which helped, but she thought coaching could help as well.

Therapists are medically licensed, and they help people with mental illness find treatment.

Coaches provide goal-oriented suggestions and recommendations.

Cohen's goal is to help people understand themselves and their symptoms. He calls these symptoms their superpowers.

Impulsivity is one superpower he helps clients work through. He said that people with ADHD don't typically have a checkpoint where they ask themselves if what they're about to do or say is a good or bad idea.

One example of impulsivity is “blurting,” Cohen calls it. The impulse to say immediately what you’re thinking. Cohen said he’s famous for it. But impulsivity can produce even more dangerous actions, such as drug use.

Although lacking impulse control can be dangerous, Cohen found a way to show his clients that, even with the negative, impulsivity is a superpower.

Cohen said he thinks CEOs make impulsive decisions. These decisions don’t show whether the outcome will be good or bad, but the decisions have to be made. CEOs make 399 times as much as typical workers, according to the Economic Policy Institute. Cohen said he thinks CEOs probably have ADHD.

Cohen’s goal is to help those with ADHD see themselves as gifted, not handicapped, different but not broken.

“Once they are at peace with their wiring, you're fine,” he said.

When Cohen gets a new client, he typically asks them to book 10 sessions. He wants the client to feel comfortable enough to share what they’ve gone through. He tries to help them understand themselves by flipping their perspective.

“It takes time to develop a new mindset,” Cohen said.

One-on-one coaching is Cohen’s primary work in the field of ADHD. He is trying other ways to help by bringing people with ADHD together. The idea came to him in the middle of the night.

“Hey, Hun wake up,” he told his wife, Kimberly. “I’ve got another business idea.”

This idea was to start an ADHD retreat. This retreat would bring people with ADHD together for five days and four nights to talk about their experiences with ADHD. It also would give them a chance to be themselves and build community support. The point is to get people talking— to show them they aren’t alone.

“Because now the conversation started, and I’m not the only one whose having it,” Cohen said.

Cohen also has begun hosting a podcast called, “ADHD Un-Shamed.” He posted the first episode last month and has recorded dozens more. He hopes it will get more people with ADHD talking.

“I think you’re going to hear more,” Cohen said.

Cohen changed his symptoms to superpowers. He had passion, but he found his purpose. He hopes to show other people with ADHD they can do the same.

He also hopes to-

“Wait, what was the question?,” Cohen asked.

