

# How to Thrive with Adult ADD / ADHD

by

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## Class 7: Follow-Through

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### The FIVE STAGES of FOLLOW-THROUGH

*Getting an idea acted upon involves five basic stages:*

1. **Idea** – Your Vision or Goal
2. **Feasibility** – Doing a Realty Check
3. **Strategy** – Planning and Timetables
4. **Implementation** – Taking Action Steps
5. **Completion** – Tying It Together

Let's look at these steps one at a time.

#### Stage 1: Idea

This is the beginning, when you first develop your vision or goal. Be intentional, stating the goal as clearly as possible. Your vision should state what, why, how, who is involved, and by when. Note the difference between a vague idea in (a) below, and the well-fleshed out intentional vision in (b):

- a) *"I want to write a book about my dog."* Compare this to:
- b) *"I will write a book about my terrier, Ralph, told from the dog's point of view. It will describe his travels across America with me in the van, his humorous observations about humanity and the different situations we encounter. Writing an average of three*

*hours a day, I will have the outline and first three chapters written in three months, have an agent within five months and will target having a book contract in nine months.”*

**SUMMARY:** *Make sure your idea is written or recorded as a well-thought out, intentional vision. Consider questions like **what, why, how, who is involved, and when** you are targeting for completion.*

## **Stage 2: Feasibility**

Now do a “reality check” on your idea. Find out what restrictions exist, anticipate roadblocks that may stand in your way, and determine what kind of help you’ll need. You may need to modify your vision at this stage, based on what you discover.

This is the stage that impulsive ADDers are most often tempted to skip. If you don’t look at reality at this stage, it will most likely deter you from your path when you hit a snag in the action stage. Curb the tendency towards black/white thinking here. Discovering a glitch that you hadn’t anticipated is not necessarily a reason to abandon the whole idea.

**SUMMARY:** *Think of what needs to be done, to determine if your idea is feasible. Modify the vision if necessary. Avoid a tendency to be **over-optimistic, or overly pessimistic.***

## **Stage 3: Strategy**

What strategies will you follow to best achieve your vision? If you’ve thought through Stages 1 and 2, this will come more easily. Your strategy will require action steps, and a projected timetable. You may have a choice of several strategies; perhaps this stage will involve analytical thinking to narrow it down to the best few strategies.

**Consider your own ADD traits and tendencies when creating your strategy!** Common ADD tendencies in this stage can include:

- Skipping this planning altogether. A leap from idea straight into action, with no planning or strategy, will result in wasted time, a need to undo mistakes, or hitting roadblocks that could have been anticipated or avoided.

- Spending too much time planning, going far a-field of the original proposition. For those who enjoy planning, you might allow your imagination to take over and pull you off on tangents. To stay on track, you could use a timer to maintain your focus.
- Overly optimistic strategies and timetable. You may think you're superman, and come up with an impossible amount of action steps to be accomplished in too short a time. You need to consider this goal in the context of all the aspects of your life as well.
- Inability to estimate how long each step will take. A poor time sense may paralyze you in coming up with your timetable. (Use the **Time Sense Exercise** from Class 3 to develop a time sense!)
- Difficulty prioritizing. Plotting the action steps of your strategy requires some steps to come before others. ADDers sometimes have a hard time determining the sequence.
- Reluctance to delegate. Think about who could help you in parts of the plan that you're less likely to do well yourself.

Laying out your action steps in a long-term calendar helps you to visualize them, and serves as a reality check. (See the **Strategic Intention Calendar** included towards the end of this document.)

***SUMMARY:** Curb impatience to create a working strategy. Lay out your strategy and action plans with a timetable. Ask for advice from someone with good analytical judgment to help evaluate your plan. Use the **Strategic Intention Calendar** to keep you on track.*

## Stage 4: Implementation

Action! This is where you'll do what is needed to see your idea through to completion. You'll stumble here if you skipped Stages 2 and 3. You may need to modify as you go. If you have to change course on a step or strategy, pay attention to how that may affect the rest of the plan.

Avoid going into overwhelm by breaking up the plan into small pieces and steps that can be seen or measured. Consider the completion of each larger step as a milestone.

Watch out for black/white thinking, which can trip you up if you let it. There's nothing wrong with making modifications in how you achieve your goal. The need for a shift in strategy doesn't mean your idea was poor to begin with, as long as you thought it through in Stage 2.

Communication is critical here, if you need to manage other people's expectations. Let people involved know of your progress, and any change to the anticipated timetable. Share your successes.

Pay attention to what you learn along the way. It can be helpful to keep a progress log, so that you can learn from mistakes, as well as what you did right.

Stay focused on the goals and target dates. If you have a tendency to get distracted by life, have a strategy that will hold your focus on your goal. A coach can help! Or ask a friend or colleague to serve as a project coach on the project.

***SUMMARY:*** *Implement your strategy in **measurable steps**. Retain flexibility to **modify your plan as needed**, while staying **focused on your goal**. Be **proactive about communicating** your progress to anyone involved. Celebrate your **milestones along the way**.*

## **Stage 5: Tying it together**

This is the stage that is often forgotten. It is almost an after-stage. It may involve pulling together the loose ends, communicating the result, recording lessons learned, or organizing information for the future. This stage gives a true feeling of completion or accomplishment, and helps you and others feel that you really followed through. Now you can blow your horn with real credibility.

For example, if you succeeded in publishing your book about Ralph the terrier, you may want to send an announcement to all your friends, throw yourself a party, and send flowers to your agent and editor as a "thank you." And don't forget to file the financial records for your tax accountant.

***SUMMARY:*** *Give yourself **closure**: communication to others, recording or organizing of information, and celebrating the accomplishment.*

## **Test Your "Follow-Through IQ"**

Based on your own past experience in follow-through, rate yourself on how often you perform each of the five stages, along the following scale:

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1 = Hardly ever    2 = Occasionally    3 = Sometimes    4 = Often    5 = Almost always

**Stage 1: Idea** – I think through my idea, visualizing it with intention. \_\_\_\_\_

**Stage 2: Feasibility** – I examine whether my idea is feasible, and what it will take to bring it to reality. \_\_\_\_\_

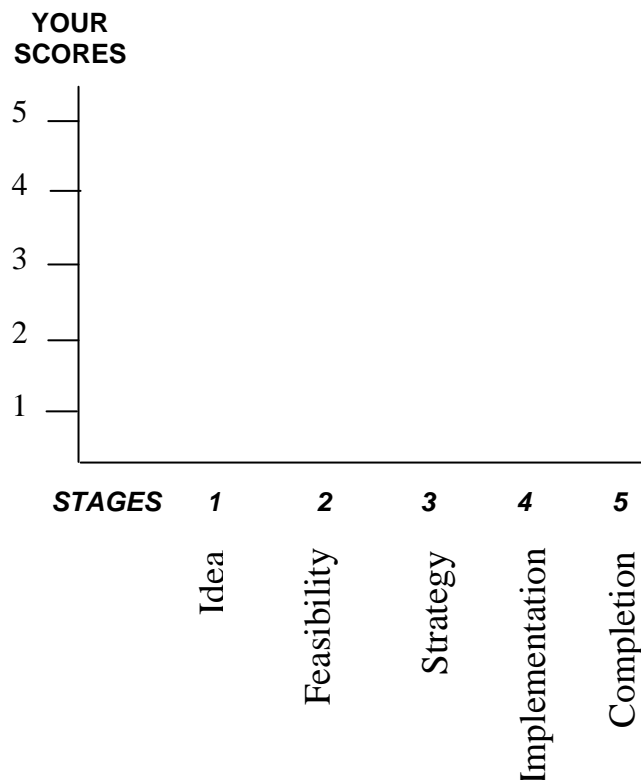
**Stage 3: Strategy** – I plan out the strategy and timetable to reach my goal. \_\_\_\_\_

**Stage 4: Implementation** – I follow through on all the necessary steps. \_\_\_\_\_

**Stage 5: Completion** – I tie up any loose ends, and achieve the goal with a sense of satisfaction. \_\_\_\_\_

### Chart your Scores

Mark your scores on this graph, to see where your areas of difficulty are.



## CASE STUDIES

We'll look at two composite case studies as examples of follow-through strategy:

1. Ed – Designing and building a room addition over the garage.
2. Kara – Creating a training curriculum at her company

### Ed – Building a Room Addition

**PROJECT: Designing & building a room addition to his home.**

#### ***Ed's Background & Tendencies:***

Ed studied architecture in school and worked on construction projects as a summer job. Although he ultimately did not pursue a career in architecture, he never lost his love of designing spaces.

Ed is a detail-minded perfectionist who tends to hyper-focus on getting the details of his chosen projects just right. He is easily overwhelmed when making decisions about prioritizing, and feels paralyzed when pressured with deadlines. He is concerned about the quality of his work, and ruminates if he thinks something isn't right. He works best independently, but has a tendency to wait too long to begin things if he's not sure where to start, or wants to continue gathering information. Ed is easily distracted by tangents in his own thinking, and veers off-track when he imagines new possibilities that he wants to explore. He operates best with some degree of structure to keep him on target.

#### ***Stage 1: Idea***

Ed's tendency would be to visualize the construction of the room addition in great detail. He would do a meticulous architectural drawing, perhaps redoing it several times, before showing it to his wife, Maggie. He would get annoyed if she disagreed with aspects of the plan, feeling that any deviation would throw off the whole concept. His vision would be much more concerned with the details of the room than with time or cost considerations. He would intend to do all of the work himself.

### **Recommended Strategy:**

- Create a vision that would answer the questions: why, what, how, with whom, by and when. Any elaboration of the vision should be tied back to these questions. The “why” is particularly important, since this states the project’s purpose.
- Since the room addition will be used for the family, Ed should get Maggie’s buy-in on the concept before spending time in elaborate architectural drawings.

### **Stage 2: Feasibility**

In the past, Ed would become easily discouraged by constraints on his idea. He would tend to take an “all or nothing” approach, or ruminate about possible set-backs. The Feasibility Stage for this project would involve researching the building code, analyzing cost considerations, and his gaining Maggie’s cooperation. Ed’s challenge is to keep an open mind and practice flexibility. He also needs to be realistic about whether it makes sense to do every aspect himself.

### **Recommended Strategy:**

- Determine local building ordinances regarding room additions.
- Draw a very basic blueprint to show Maggie, along with a projected timetable for completion, and a preliminary budget. Have an open discussion about what the room could include, and various options.
- Make preliminary contacts with a few recommended contractors to determine costs, and to consider what aspects of the work Ed will do, and what makes more sense to hire out.
- Schedule specific dates to discuss what progress was made with Maggie, using her as a “coach” and partner to retain flexibility and talk through options.

### **Stage 3: Strategy**

Ed would tend to hyper-focus analytically on some aspects of strategy, while forgetting to look at the project as a whole. Sometimes he would get so wrapped up in detailed strategic plans that he delayed execution. He knew that the danger in this project would

be to focus exclusively on the architectural aspects of the room, and be blasé about building permits, timeliness and costs.

**Recommended Strategy:**

- Create a mind-map to lay out thoughts on all aspects of the plan. Commit to Maggie to have final “Plan” ready to go over with her in one week.
- Use a timer. Ed’s mind tends to go into hyper-focus when working on aspects of the project that intrigue him, taking far more time than necessary. A timer would remind him to stay on task. For those areas of less interest, the timer would serve as a “homing device” to keep his mind from wandering.
- Find a distraction-free environment. For Ed, any outside noise or stimuli pulls his focus away from what he’s doing. He should set aside time in his schedule to go to a place where he knows he can concentrate. For him, this is a quiet library.
- Develop a timetable, budget and action steps for each of these stages: 1) Drawing Plans, 2) Approvals & Permits, 3) Purchasing Materials, 4) Building the Foundation, 5) Inside Construction, 6) Decorating.
- Gain approval and/or collaboration of Maggie and the chosen contractor for the timetable. Encourage them to discuss concerns and give a “reality check” to the timetable and budget.

**Stage 4: Implementation**

Ed’s history of poor follow-through had him rarely getting to the implementation stage of actually *doing* his dreamed-of projects. He would get overwhelmed and paralyzed, stymied by small disappointments and set-backs, and get discouraged. The key to overcome this tendency is to partner with someone who would help brainstorm and anticipate potential roadblocks, and hold the focus on the timetable. He also had to curb his tendency to micro-manage others whom he hired.

**Recommended Strategy:**

- Delegate the responsibility of keeping track of permits, budgets and deadlines to someone else (Maggie). Agree to provide her with timely information so that she can implement the schedule.

- Discuss expectations with hired workers, and agree at what stages to check their progress.
- Every evening, discuss progress and setbacks on the project with Maggie. Brainstorm changes in approach and alternative actions where appropriate. When unexpected delays or setbacks occur, resist black/white thinking and rumination by asking “Is this a reason to abandon the project, or can we find an alternative solution?”

### **Stage 5: Completion**

Maggie knew that Ed would tend to lose interest in the final aspects of making the room livable, once “his part” (the design and construction) was finished. He would be likely to forget to budget in painting, carpeting, lighting and furniture. And he probably would forget to keep records on money spent that could be a write-off on taxes.

#### **Recommended Strategy:**

- Include the Completion Stage steps in the plan from the beginning. Build the Completion Stage aspects into the overall strategy, budget and timetable.
- Delegate these parts of the project specifically to Maggie, and alert the accountant about possible tax implications of the room addition.
- Commit to a celebration. Announce a “room warming” party to friends in advance, to retain accountability for finishing by a set date.

## **Kara – Creating a Training Program for Her Organization**

**PROJECT: Developing and implementing a “Leadership Training Center” in her organization.**

#### **Kara’s Background & Tendencies:**

Kara is the manager of Training & Development for a 1,000-person financial services company, First Finance. The work of the company is primarily in sales, customer service and operations. Most of the leaders have risen up through the ranks, and have spent their entire careers at First Finance. Kara has six trainers on her staff, experienced in training employees on the specific skills that will be needed in their jobs.

Kara, who gained her experience as a corporate trainer and manager in other companies, was surprised to find how little the First Finance managers knew about effective leadership. Kara decided to bring leadership training to her company by forming an internal “Leadership Training Center.”

Kara is a creative, big-picture thinker, impulsive and impatient with details. She changes jobs often, as soon as she starts to become bored. She avoids conflict, and works best under pressure and deadlines. She operates intuitively and relies on her instincts and persuasive abilities.

### **Stage 1: Idea**

Kara had confidence in her ability to persuade the company president of the importance of a Leadership Training Center (LTC). She got on his calendar the next day to explain her idea, and the goal of making all levels of management more effective leaders. The president agreed that this was a worthy goal, and gave Kara the green light to “look into it and get back to me with a plan.”

#### **Recommended Strategy:**

- *Kara should put the vision in writing to make sure she and the president are in agreement as to the purpose and goal, who would get the training, what kind of training, and some cost considerations. So far, the idea has gained approval in theory, but is still rather vague.*

### **Stage 2: Feasibility**

Kara was working with several constraints to consider: budget, staff expertise, and cooperation of the organization. She needed to be very realistic about how she would bring leadership training to the organization, when her own staff trainers were not experienced in this kind of training. She would also require the cooperation of the department heads, people who historically had been reluctant to let their staff leave their jobs to get trained in even job-specific operations. Kara tended to gloss over these details, in her eagerness to get final approval.

#### **Recommended Strategy:**

- *Slow down! Kara should interview several Leadership Training companies to determine costs and course offerings. She should also get the input of her training staff to*

*determine who among them might be good candidates for learning to deliver this kind of training.*

- *Test the waters. Kara should determine management's attitudes towards leadership training, by asking. Knowing her tendency to avoid the negative, Kara could commit to scheduling these meetings right away.*
- *Reality test. After putting together a preliminary schedule and budget, Kara should ask for the input of some members of her staff and the organization to make sure the timetable will work with yearly operations deadlines.*
- *Gain final approval. Make sure the president approves every important assumption in the written plan, and agrees on what kind of communication and progress checks are expected.*

### **Stage 3: Strategy**

Kara's tendency is to gloss over the details involved in developing a workable long-term strategy, and hope for the best. With so much riding on this venture, she should stop to anticipate possible pitfalls and think through different solutions. She also has to communicate more closely with staff members who can help her, instead of flying by the seat of her pants. Kara would do well to think about her own traits and tendencies, and the best strategies to work with them effectively. For example, she could consider the best ways to mitigate her impulsiveness and impatience with detail.

#### **Recommended Strategy:**

- *Assign staff members to the project, with specific responsibilities where appropriate.*
- *Work in the best environment for concentration. Kara, like many ADDers, thinks best in a lively environment where there is some activity around her that does not actually involve her. She could take her planning materials to a café, and create her strategies there without interruption. Even if this required working in the evening, she will be more productive if she can concentrate in an environment of her choice.*
- *Create a project calendar to schedule announcements and progress reports, to manage expectations of the organization with periodic communications about the new Center.*

- Collaborate. Although involving others sometimes takes longer, pulling together a panel of experts from other areas to add input would help Kara achieve organizational buy-in, as well as achieving a more meaningful product.

### **Stage 4: Implementation**

Kara had previously been guilty of “ready, fire, aim,” jumping into implementation without a plan. She then would have to constantly put out fires, or re-do work that hadn’t been thought through the first time. Kara also knew she was impatient with details, which had been a problem when the president wanted detailed reports of class attendance and cost breakdowns.

As manager of the Training Department, there were other priorities that will require Kara’s attention. Her challenge will be to stay on course with developing the LTC, while not dropping the ball on other necessary projects. She’ll need to guard against her tendency to react to whatever is happening in the moment.

#### **Recommended Strategy:**

- Delegate key responsibilities. Work with a staff member to develop regular report templates, to capture important information that Kara would have a tendency to skip. Choose someone who is good with details, and who can be responsible for collecting this information.
- Create a checklist. Kara needs this for herself, to make sure she is covering all the bases in implementation and roll-out.
- Set up meetings ahead of time. Knowing her tendency to avoid conflict, Kara should commit to meet with managers at all levels, to hear their early feedback on the training.
- Maintain one calendar for all projects. Kara could use the Strategic Calendar for the year, filling in necessary steps for different projects in different colors.

### **Stage 5: Completion**

Kara’s needs to make sure her history of losing interest in a project once it was implemented would not undermine her. This major undertaking will surely need tweaking and modifications as it is rolled out, based on feedback. As the training manager, Kara is

responsible for making sure someone is overseeing this. She will also have to continue communicating how the program is doing.

**Recommended Strategy:**

- *As in the Implementation Stage, Kara needs to include the key follow-up steps on her long-term calendar. She should delegate someone to report progress to her on a regular basis, if she isn't able to monitor it closely enough herself.*

## YOUR NEXT STEPS

### Designing Your Own Structure

Many people find it easier to get started and follow through in environments with built-in accountability and structure, such as an organization. If you do well in structured settings, but have trouble following through on your own, you might do best to try to create more structure for yourself.

***Structuring your project should involve a “blueprint” that identifies steps, dates, and other people who may be needed.***

- Set milestones for accomplishment. Marking down the steps and assigning “milestones” can have a powerful effect in creating the structure you need to start.
- Make commitments involving other people. Make advance commitments for later steps, and bring other people on board to help.
- Create a reward structure. Consider a way to reward yourself along the way for reaching milestones and target goals. Don't leave the entire reward until the very end.

### Identifying Your Traits and Creating Strategies

Most likely, your own tendencies and traits aren't exactly like either Ed's or Kara's, but may be a combination of the two. The key is to identify exactly what your ADD tendencies are, so that you can start self-coaching – creating strategies for following through that you will be likely to follow. Be sure to take your attention span into account.

## STRATEGIC INTENTION CALENDAR

<b>January</b> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;">Enter information here: <b>Suggestion:</b> Use different colors for different projects, to make each one easier to track at a glance!</div>	<b>February</b> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 120px; margin-top: 10px;"></div>	<b>March</b> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 120px; margin-top: 10px;"></div>
<b>April</b> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 120px; margin-top: 10px;"></div>	<b>May</b> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 120px; margin-top: 10px;"></div>	<b>June</b> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 120px; margin-top: 10px;"></div>
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<b>October</b> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 120px; margin-top: 10px;"></div>	<b>November</b> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 120px; margin-top: 10px;"></div>	<b>December</b> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 120px; margin-top: 10px;"></div>

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## PRACTICE

These suggested assignments are optional.

**Based on your “Follow-Through IQ,” what are your strong and weak points regarding typical past follow-through efforts?**

**Plan how you’ll work through a particular project or goal.**

**1. What are your personality traits, habits and behavioral tendencies that will affect how you work on the project? *Examples are:***

- Big-picture thinker, or detail-oriented
- Perfectionist and analytical, or impulsive and quick-thinking
- Meet conflict head-on, or avoid difficult communication
- Work best with deadlines, or shut down under pressure
- Think best alone, or brainstorming with others

**2. Work out the stages of the project:**

- Write a specific and compelling vision the project or goal.
- Identify what you need to consider for determining feasibility.
- Identify the key points of strategy, including some target dates for milestones.
  - Break them further down into action steps; perhaps assign projected time to complete the steps.
  - Identify steps that will involve others.
  - Take your personality traits, tendencies and habits into account to create a realistic strategy.
- What possible roadblocks might you anticipate once you start action?
- What will you do to follow up once the project is completed?