



THE FRICTION-FREE ADHD GUIDE

A User Manual for the Adult ADHD Brain

DESIGNED FOR HOW YOUR BRAIN ACTUALLY
WORKS



CONTENTS

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

How to Use This Book

Read this first

PART ONE — UNDERSTANDING YOUR ADHD BRAIN

Chapter 1 — The Executive Function Manual Nobody Gave You

Chapter 2 — Friction Theory for Neurodivergent Brains

Chapter 3 — The Dopamine Economy

PART TWO — THE FRICTION-FREE TOOLKIT

Chapter 4 — Initiation Systems

Chapter 5 — Persistence Engines

Chapter 6 — Completion Rituals

PART THREE — REAL-WORLD APPLICATIONS

Chapter 7 — Work & Career Systems

Chapter 8 — Home & Daily Life

Chapter 9 — Relationships & Communication

BACK MATTER

Quick Reference Appendix

All core tools on one page

About the Author

INTRODUCTION

How to Use This Book

This book was not written to be read in order. That would be ironic, given its audience. You are holding a manual for a brain that finds linear instruction mildly torturous. So here is permission, in writing, to skip around.

Part One explains the neuroscience behind why ADHD brains behave the way they do. Read it if you want to understand the "why" before the "how." Skip it if you already know your brain is wired differently and just want the tools.

Part Two is the core toolkit — Initiation, Persistence, and Completion. If you only read three chapters, read these.

Part Three applies the toolkit to specific life domains: work, home, and relationships. Jump directly to the chapter causing you the most pain right now.

The Quick Reference Appendix at the back condenses every tool in the book onto a single section. If you never re-read the full chapters, the Appendix alone is worth bookmarking.

ONE RULE

Pick one tool. Not five. Not your favorite chapter. One thing you will try today.

The ADHD brain's biggest enemy isn't lack of information — it's having too many options and picking none. Choose one. Try it. Come back.

A note on what this book is not: It is not a medical manual, a substitute for professional evaluation, or a cure. It does not suggest that systems alone can replace medication for those who need it, nor that willpower is the missing ingredient. What it offers is practical, specific, field-tested accommodation strategies — ways to engineer your environment and behavior so your brain can work with you instead of against you.

You are not lazy. You are not broken. You are running a high-performance system without the right interface. This book is the interface update.

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PART ONE

Understanding Your ADHD Brain

Before we build systems, we need to understand why traditional productivity advice fails for ADHD brains. This section covers the neuroscience of executive function and the "friction points" unique to neurodivergent thinking.

CHAPTER 1

The Executive Function Manual Nobody Gave You

Why your brain isn't broken—it's just operating on different settings

Most productivity books assume your brain works like a filing cabinet. Information goes in, gets organized alphabetically, and comes out when needed. For ADHD brains, it's more like a busy restaurant kitchen during the dinner rush—everything is happening at once, orders are getting lost, and the chef is screaming.

This isn't a character flaw. It's a difference in **executive function**—the neurological processes that manage time, prioritize tasks, hold information in working memory, and regulate emotional responses to effort. When you understand these mechanics, you stop blaming yourself and start designing systems that actually fit your cognitive architecture.



Friction Point: The "Just Try Harder" Trap

Neurotypical advice assumes lack of effort is the problem. For ADHD, it's often a mismatch between the task and available dopamine. Trying harder without changing the system is like pushing a car with the parking brake on—it wastes energy and convinces you that you're the problem.

CHAPTER 1 (CONTINUED)

What Executive Function Actually Means

Executive function is the CEO of your brain. It handles six critical operations: planning and organization, working memory, emotional regulation, sustained attention, task initiation, and impulse control. In ADHD brains, these functions don't follow the standard operating procedures—they run on different fuel and different timing.

Research using fMRI scans shows that ADHD brains have reduced activity in the prefrontal cortex and basal ganglia during routine tasks. These areas handle "boring but necessary" executive oversight. When neurotypical brains get a hit of dopamine from completing mundane tasks, ADHD brains often don't—creating a neurological incentive gap.

Science Note: The Dopamine Difference

Dopamine isn't just the "pleasure chemical"—it's the motivation neurotransmitter. ADHD brains have irregular dopamine regulation, often featuring lower baseline levels and reduced receptor sensitivity. This creates what researchers call "interest-based nervous systems"—brains that require higher stakes or novelty to activate.

The result? Tasks that feel "easy" to others—like filling out paperwork, folding laundry, or sitting through meetings—require exponentially more cognitive fuel for ADHD brains. It's not that you can't do them. It's that your brain treats them like running a marathon in sand.

CHAPTER 1 (CONTINUED)

The Three Pillars of ADHD Friction

Every task requires three distinct neurological operations: Initiation (getting started), Persistence (continuing through difficulty), and Completion (finishing and closing the loop). ADHD brains encounter unique friction at each pillar—specific breakpoints where energy leaks out and tasks stall.

Initiation Friction: This is the "activation energy" problem. Neurotypical brains transition between states relatively smoothly. ADHD brains often experience "task inertia"—a profound resistance to starting that feels physical, not mental. The longer you delay, the heavier the task feels, creating a shame spiral that makes starting even harder.

Persistence Friction: Once started, ADHD brains often hit "the wall" faster than others. Not because of laziness, but because sustained attention without immediate feedback creates a dopamine deficit. The brain literally begins searching for more stimulating inputs (distractions) to regulate itself.

STOP & MAP YOUR FRICTION

Think of three tasks you avoided this week. For each, identify which pillar failed:

- **Initiation:** Couldn't start, kept procrastinating
- **Persistence:** Started but got distracted/abandoned halfway
- **Completion:** Almost finished but couldn't finalize/submit

Don't judge—just notice the pattern.

CHAPTER 1 (CONTINUED)

Completion & The Open Loop Problem

Completion Friction is perhaps the most insidious. Many ADHDers are great starters but terrible finishers. Projects sit at 90% for months. Emails languish in drafts. The final step—hitting send, filing the document, closing the tab—requires a specific cognitive closure that ADHD brains resist.

This creates "open loops"—unfinished mental cycles that consume background processing power. Every unclosed task is a browser tab in your brain, draining RAM. The result is chronic mental fatigue, not from doing too much, but from having too many unfinished things.

The Friction-Free approach doesn't ask you to "push through" these breakpoints. Instead, it redesigns the task architecture to bypass them entirely—using external structures, environmental design, and dopamine regulation to make initiation automatic, persistence sustainable, and completion satisfying.



Friction Point: The Perfectionism Freeze

Many ADHDers stall at completion because they can't reach "perfect." Since good enough feels neurologically unsatisfying (no dopamine hit), they wait for perfect, which never comes. The loop stays open forever.

CHAPTER 2

Friction Theory for Neurodivergent Brains

Physics applied to psychology—why small obstacles feel like walls

In physics, friction converts kinetic energy into heat. In productivity, friction converts motivation into exhaustion. Every extra step, every unclear instruction, every missing tool is a point of friction that drains your limited executive function budget.

Neurotypical brains have higher "friction tolerance"—they can push through multiple steps, delayed gratification, and unclear processes without significant depletion. ADHD brains have lower friction tolerance but higher creative capacity. This isn't weakness; it's a different energy economy.

Think of it this way: A neurotypical brain runs on regular gasoline—steady, predictable combustion. An ADHD brain runs on rocket fuel—either blasting off or

idle, with no in-between. Standard productivity systems are designed for gasoline engines. You need a different engineering entirely.

Key Concept: Friction Budget

You have a limited amount of "friction tolerance" per day, per task, per hour. High-friction tasks (multi-step, boring, unclear) deplete it rapidly. Low-friction tasks (clear, immediate, stimulating) conserve it. Manage the budget, manage the output.

CHAPTER 2 (CONTINUED)

The Four Types of Productivity Friction

Cognitive Friction: Mental effort required to figure out what to do next. Includes unclear instructions, complex prioritization, or vague goals. Example: "Organize the house" has high cognitive friction. "Put dirty clothes in the blue hamper" has low cognitive friction.

Physical Friction: The literal steps required to complete an action. If you need to file a document, and the filing cabinet is upstairs, behind a locked door, and requires a key that's in another room—that's massive physical friction. ADHD brains will abandon the task rather than navigate the obstacle course.

Emotional Friction: The feeling states that accompany tasks. Shame, anxiety, boredom, or overwhelm create emotional resistance. Tasks associated with past failures carry emotional friction before you even start them.

Temporal Friction: Time-related resistance. Tasks that feel like they'll take "forever" (even if they won't) create initiation paralysis. Tasks without clear endpoints create persistence drag. Time blindness—an ADHD neurological trait—makes temporal friction especially brutal.

CHAPTER 2 (CONTINUED)

Friction Audit: Finding Your Leaks

You can't fix what you can't see. Before building new systems, audit your current friction points. Pick one recurring task—say, doing the dishes—and map every micro-friction:

Current State Analysis: Dishes pile up because the sink is full → need to move dishes to clear sink → dishwasher is full of clean dishes → need to empty dishwasher first → dishwasher is noisy and takes 10 minutes → 10 minutes feels like an hour → abandon task → order takeout to avoid making more dishes → shame spiral.

AUDIT EXERCISE

Pick your most avoided task. Write out every single step currently required, no matter how small. Include emotional steps ("feel overwhelmed," "remember last time I failed"). Now count: How many friction points exist before the actual work begins?

Most ADHDers discover that their "laziness" is actually a 15-step obstacle course to begin a 5-minute task. No wonder you're exhausted. The Friction-Free method removes steps until the path from intention to action is a straight line.

CHAPTER 2 (CONTINUED)

The Lubricants: Reducing Friction

Friction-Free design uses four lubricants: Visibility (don't store things in drawers), Single-Stepping (never require sequential actions), Proximity (keep everything within arm's reach), and Externalization (don't use your brain as a hard drive).

Visibility: If you can't see it, it doesn't exist. ADHD working memory is unreliable. Open storage, clear containers, wall-mounted lists, and physical reminders reduce cognitive load. A closed drawer is a black hole.

Single-Stepping: Break the addiction to "efficient" multi-step processes. If checking email requires opening laptop, finding charger, waiting for boot, connecting to

VPN, then checking email—you'll never do it. Design for the dopamine of immediate action.



Friction Point: The Efficiency Trap

Neurotypical systems optimize for efficiency (fewest total steps). ADHD systems must optimize for initiation (easiest first step). Sometimes the "inefficient" path that starts immediately beats the "efficient" path that never starts.

Proximity & Externalization: Every item should live where it's used, not where it "belongs." Your brain should hold as little as possible—use paper, apps, labels, and alarms to externalize memory. Cognitive load is your enemy.

CHAPTER 3

The Dopamine Economy

Managing your brain's scarce motivation currency

Dopamine is the currency of effort. Every action you take "costs" dopamine. Every reward "pays" it. ADHD brains have a unique economy: lower baseline income, higher costs for routine tasks, and jackpot payouts for novelty and urgency.

Understanding this economy changes everything. You stop trying to "budget" like a neurotypical person (steady income, steady expenses) and start managing like a venture capitalist—knowing you have dry spells and windfalls, planning for both, and investing in high-yield activities.

The Dopamine Economy has three rules: 1) You cannot save dopamine for later—use it or lose it, 2) Interest payments are real—boring tasks compound in cost the longer you avoid them, and 3) Bankruptcy is real—when you hit zero, nothing happens until external urgency forces a loan against future capacity.

Metaphor Check

Don't take the "economy" metaphor literally—dopamine regulation is complex neuroscience. But thinking in terms of costs, budgets, and investments helps make intuitive sense of why some tasks feel impossible despite being "easy."

CHAPTER 3 (CONTINUED)

Interest-Based vs. Importance-Based

William Dodson, MD, coined the term "Interest-Based Nervous System" to describe how ADHD brains prioritize. Neurotypical brains use importance, rewards, and consequences to prioritize tasks. ADHD brains use interest, challenge, novelty, and urgency (ICNU).

This means telling an ADHDer "this is important" or "you'll get a bonus" often fails completely. The brain literally cannot translate importance into action without the ICNU fuel. But add a deadline (urgency), make it a game (challenge), or change the location (novelty), and the same task becomes possible.

This isn't childishness or lack of discipline. It's neurochemistry. The prefrontal cortex, which handles "important but boring," is underactivated in ADHD. The only way through is to hack the ICNU factors or outsource the prefrontal cortex function via external structure.



Friction Point: The Deadline Miracle

Ever notice you can do 8 hours of work in 2 hours when the deadline hits? That's not you "finally getting serious"—that's urgency creating dopamine. The task didn't change; your neurochemistry did.

CHAPTER 3 (CONTINUED)

Creating Artificial Scarcity & Urgency

Since you can't rely on importance, you must manufacture ICNU elements. This isn't cheating—it's accommodation. Creating artificial urgency with timers (Pomodoro, Time Timer), body doubling (social pressure), or accountability partners (external stakes) replicates the deadline effect without the trauma.

Gamification adds challenge and novelty. Apps like Habitica, Forest, or even simple streak counters tap into the dopamine of achievement and fear of breaking chains. But be careful—gamification stops working when it becomes routine. You need rotating systems to maintain novelty.

Temptation Bundling pairs low-dopamine tasks with high-dopamine stimuli. Only listen to your favorite podcast while folding laundry. Only drink your special coffee while answering emails. The task becomes the key to the reward, not the obstacle.

DOPAMINE AUDIT

List five tasks you avoid regularly. For each, ask: Which ICNU factor is missing?

- **Interest:** Can I make it about something I care about?
 - **Challenge:** Can I add a game element or difficulty level?
 - **Novelty:** Can I change the location, tools, or method?
 - **Urgency:** Can I create a deadline or consequence?
-

CHAPTER 3 (CONTINUED)

Managing the Crash: Rejection Sensitivity & Dopamine

ADHD often includes Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD)—intense emotional pain triggered by perceived criticism or failure. RSD is linked to dopamine dysregulation. When dopamine crashes, negative emotions hit harder and last longer.

This creates a dangerous cycle: Task requires dopamine → You try task → Dopamine depletes → Minor setback occurs → RSD triggers shame spiral → Dopamine crashes further → Task abandoned → More shame. Understanding this cycle is crucial because it explains why "just do it" can cause psychological injury.

The solution isn't willpower—it's injury prevention. Build soft failure states (if you miss a day, the system adapts, doesn't punish). Use self-compassion as a dopamine preservation strategy. Shame is expensive; self-acceptance is efficient.

Reframe: ADHD as Ferrari Brain

Dr. Edward Hallowell describes ADHD as having a Ferrari engine with bicycle brakes. High performance potential, poor inhibition control. Your job isn't to weaken the engine—it's to strengthen the brakes and build tracks that handle the speed.

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PART TWO

The Friction-Free Toolkit

Practical systems for the three pillars: getting started, staying on task, and finishing.

These are not "hacks"—they are accommodations for neurological difference.

CHAPTER 4

Initiation Systems

Defeating the wall between intention and action

Task initiation is the ADHD Achilles' heel. You know what you need to do. You want to do it. You've planned to do it. But there's an invisible force field between you and the first step. This isn't procrastination—it's neurological inertia. And it requires mechanical solutions, not motivational ones.

Initiation systems remove the "activation energy" required to start. They focus entirely on the first 60 seconds. If you can cross the threshold, momentum often carries you forward. If you can't, nothing else matters.



Friction Point: The "I'll Do It Later" Lie

Later never comes for ADHD brains because later has no dopamine. Now is the only time that feels real. Initiation systems exploit this by making "now" the only option.

CHAPTER 4 (CONTINUED)

The 5-Minute Rule & Micro-Commitments

You only need to do five minutes. Not "work on it for five minutes"—just start. Set a timer. If after five minutes you want to stop, you have full permission. This bypasses the brain's threat detection system (which sees "big task" as "pain"). Five minutes is small enough to not trigger resistance.

Micro-commitments are even smaller: "I just need to open the document." "I just need to put on my shoes." "I just need to take the pan out of the cabinet." These aren't steps toward the task—they are the entire task for now. Once the physical action happens, the brain often continues automatically.

Tool: Implementation Intentions

Don't say "I'll work out tomorrow." Say "If I finish my coffee, then I will put on my running shoes." If-then plans remove decision fatigue and link the new behavior to an existing trigger (the "anchor").

The Golden Hour: Identify your peak dopamine window (usually 1-3 hours after waking for ADHDers). Protect this window religiously. Don't waste it on email or social media. This is when initiation is easiest—use it for the hardest starts.

CHAPTER 4 (CONTINUED)

Body Doubling: The Social Battery Hack

Body doubling means having another person present while you work, even if they're doing something else. The social presence creates "performance pressure"—not anxiety, but accountability. You're less likely to switch to Instagram if someone might see you.

This works because of **social facilitation**—the brain monitors for social observers and increases task focus automatically. For ADHD, this compensates for the prefrontal cortex's poor self-monitoring. You're essentially outsourcing the "watchdog" function.

Body doubling options: Coworking spaces (even silent ones), virtual coworking via Focusmate or Zoom, working in cafes (strangers count), or asking a friend to sit in the room reading while you work. The other person doesn't need to help—they just need to exist nearby.

TRY THIS TODAY

Text a friend: "Can we FaceTime silently for 30 minutes while we both work?"

Keep cameras on but microphones off. Notice how much easier it is to start when someone "sees" you. This is free and works immediately.

CHAPTER 4 (CONTINUED)

Environmental Design: Make Default = Action

Your environment determines your behavior more than your willpower does.

Initiation friction is often physical: tools are hidden, steps are many, distractions are visible. Redesign so the path of least resistance leads to the desired action.

The Rule of Visibility: If you need to take vitamins, they go on the counter, not in the cabinet. If you need to exercise, the shoes go by the door, not in the closet. If you need to work, the laptop opens to the project (not desktop), and the phone goes in another room.

Friction Reversal: Add steps to bad habits, remove steps from good ones. Want to stop snacking? Put snacks in opaque containers on high shelves. Want to drink more water? Put three filled bottles on your desk every morning.



Friction Point: The Phone Proximity Trap

Having your phone within arm's reach reduces cognitive capacity by 10%—even if it's off. Your brain burns energy "not checking it." The fix: Phone lives in another room during work blocks. Use an Apple Watch or analog clock for time.

CHAPTER 4 (CONTINUED)

Initiation Rituals & Transition Objects

ADHD brains struggle with transitions—switching from "home mode" to "work mode" or "relax mode" to "chore mode." Rituals create bridges between states. They signal to the brain that a context switch is happening, reducing the "activation cost."

A ritual is a consistent, sensory-rich sequence: "When I make this specific tea and put on these headphones, work starts." The tea and headphones become **transition objects**—physical anchors that carry the context with them.

Effective rituals are: specific (same object every time), sensory (touch, smell, taste involved), and non-negotiable (you never skip them). Over time, the ritual itself creates dopamine because it signals "interesting thing is about to happen."

Example Rituals

- Work: Specific playlist, specific candle, specific hoodie
- Sleep: Specific tea, specific book, specific pillow arrangement
- Exercise: Specific pre-workout drink, specific playlist, specific shoes-only-for-gym

Persistence Engines

Staying on task when the dopamine dips

Starting is hard; continuing is harder. ADHD brains hit "the wall"—a point where the dopamine from novelty wears off and the remaining work feels like pulling teeth. This is where most tasks die. Persistence engines keep you moving through the wall without burning out.

The key insight: Persistence isn't about forcing concentration. It's about managing the **task-switching cost** and **sensory regulation**. Your brain drifts because the task stopped feeding it, not because you're weak.



Friction Point: The "Parking Lot" Problem

When a distracting thought appears ("I need to buy milk"), most people try to suppress it. ADHD brains can't suppress—they can only postpone. The thought keeps returning, louder, until you address it.

CHAPTER 5 (CONTINUED)

The Parking Lot Method

Keep a physical "parking lot"—a piece of paper next to you. When an intrusive thought arises ("email Sarah," "check that notification"), don't act on it. Write it on the parking lot. Tell your brain: "This is acknowledged and deferred. I will handle it after this block."

This works because it closes the loop mentally without closing it physically. The brain stops nagging because the item is "safe" on paper. For ADHD, the anxiety of forgetting is often worse than the distraction itself. Externalizing the memory removes the anxiety.

The Two-Minute Rule Exception: If the parked item takes under two minutes and you can do it without switching contexts (reaching for phone = context switch), do it immediately. Otherwise, it waits until your current block ends.

PARKING LOT PRACTICE

Start a 25-minute timer. Keep a sticky note labeled "Later." Every time your brain says "do something else," write it down instead. At the end, count the items. You'll usually have 5-10. Those were potential derailments you avoided.

CHAPTER 5 (CONTINUED)

Sensory Regulation & The Fidget Factor

ADHD brains require sensory input to maintain focus. Complete silence is often worse than moderate noise. Stillness creates cognitive itchiness. Fidgeting isn't distraction—it's regulation.

Optimal work environments for ADHD often include: background noise (brown noise, cafe sounds, or lo-fi beats—not music with lyrics), tactile stimulation (stress balls, textured desk mats, chewing gum), and movement (standing desks, under-desk bikes, or frequent pacing breaks).

The Fidget Toy Renaissance: Don't shame the fidget. Use complex fidgets (Tangle toys, magnet spheres, textured stones) during phone calls or reading. The sensory channel occupies the "looking for distraction" part of the brain, leaving the cognitive channel free for work.

Sensory Matching

High-focus tasks need low-arousal sensory input (white noise, smooth textures). Low-focus tasks need high-arousal input (upbeat music, crunchy snacks, bright light). Match the sensory stimulation to the attention required.

CHAPTER 5 (CONTINUED)

The Layer Cake Method

Never do one thing for hours. That's dopamine suicide. The Layer Cake Method stacks three different tasks in alternating 20-30 minute blocks: one creative, one administrative, one physical.

Example stack: Writing (creative) → Email (admin) → Folding laundry (physical) → Writing → Email → Laundry. When the creative brain tires, you switch to administrative (different mode), then to physical (movement restores dopamine), then back.

This exploits **novelty-seeking** rather than fighting it. You're not "getting distracted"—you're rotating crops to keep the soil fertile. Each return to a task type feels fresh because you had a break.



Friction Point: The "Just One More Thing" Trap

ADHD hyperfocus can keep you on task too long, draining all reserves. Set alarms not just to start, but to STOP. The goal is sustainable persistence, not burnout sprints.

CHAPTER 5 (CONTINUED)

Body Doubling for Persistence

Body doubling works even better for continuation than initiation. The social presence prevents the "phantom break"—that moment where you check your phone "real quick" and lose 40 minutes. Someone is watching (even if they're not).

Virtual body doubling works best when cameras are on but microphones are off (silent co-working). The visual presence is enough. Services like Focusmate, Caveday, or even Discord study groups provide this structure.

The "I'm Working" Signal: If you live with others, use a physical signal (door hanger, hat, specific light color) that means "I'm in a body double session—only interrupt for emergencies." This reduces the social guilt of ignoring people while protecting your focus.

CHAPTER 6

Completion Rituals

Closing the loops that drain your battery

Nothing is more expensive than an open loop. That email drafted but not sent. The project 90% done. The form filled out but not submitted. These unfinished cycles consume background cognitive resources—your brain keeps checking them, draining dopamine you need for new tasks.

Completion rituals are designed to **manufacture closure** even when the work feels imperfect. They signal to the brain: "This is done. You can release it." Without this signal, tasks remain in working memory indefinitely.



Friction Point: The 90% Freeze

ADHD perfectionism often strikes at the end. The closer to done, the higher the stakes. The last 10% feels riskier than the first 90%, so you stall indefinitely. The task stays open, leaking energy.

CHAPTER 6 (CONTINUED)

The "Good Enough" Protocol

Define "done" before you start. Not "perfect," not "the best I can possibly do"—just done. Write a checklist: "Task is done when these 3 things are true." When they're true, you stop. No "just one more tweak."

The 80% Rule: If it's 80% good, ship it. The final 20% takes 80% of the time and provides 5% of the value. For ADHD brains, that trade-off is catastrophic—it steals time from the next interesting thing.

Practice saying: "This meets the criteria for done. Done is better than perfect because perfect never arrives." Create a physical gesture—clicking "send," closing the notebook, checking a box—to anchor the closure feeling.

CLOSURE GESTURE

Create a consistent physical action that marks "complete." It could be moving a sticky note to the "Done" column, saying "Released" out loud, or literally closing a physical folder. The somatic marker helps the brain file the task as finished.

CHAPTER 6 (CONTINUED)

The Done List vs. The To-Do List

To-do lists are anxiety generators for ADHD. They show you what you haven't done. They grow infinitely. They don't account for energy levels or interruptions. To-do lists assume linear time; ADHD lives in chaotic time.

Done lists are dopamine generators. Keep a "Done" list alongside your to-dos. Every time you finish anything—no matter how small—write it on the Done list. "Made coffee." "Replied to Sarah." "Took meds." This creates a visible record of productivity, countering the "I never do anything" narrative common in ADHD.

The Reverse To-Do: At the end of the day, write down everything you actually did. This is your real to-do list for tomorrow's Done list. It reveals where your energy actually went, helping you plan more realistically.

Narrative Reframing

ADHD brains often feel "I did nothing today" because they didn't do the intended priority. But they did 40 other things. The Done list proves you were working—the work just wasn't what you planned. This prevents shame spirals.

CHAPTER 6 (CONTINUED)

Closing the Day: The Shutdown Ritual

Carryover is cognitive poison. When work bleeds into evening, you don't recharge—you just switch to low-grade anxiety mode. A shutdown ritual creates a hard boundary between work-self and rest-self.

The Ritual Steps: 1) Review the Done list (acknowledge what happened), 2) Scan the to-do list and pick tomorrow's anchor task (only one), 3) Clear physical workspace

(closed laptop, cleared desk), 4) State a closing phrase ("Work is closed until tomorrow"), 5) Physical transition (walk around the block, change clothes, specific music).

The goal isn't to finish everything—it's to **park the car properly**. A car parked in neutral rolls away. A car in park with the brake on stays put. The ritual puts the day in park.



Friction Point: The Revenge Bedtime Procrastination

ADHDers often stay up late as "revenge" for not controlling their day. They didn't choose their tasks, so they choose their bedtime. Rituals restore agency—you chose to close the day—reducing the need for revenge.

CHAPTER 6 (CONTINUED)

Celebration & Dopamine Replenishment

ADHD brains rarely celebrate finishing. They immediately worry about the next thing, or they crash from the dopamine withdrawal. Completion without celebration feels like loss, not achievement.

Micro-Celebrations: When you finish, do something physical—throw hands up, say "YES," do a victory lap around the room, eat a specific treat reserved only for completion. This seems silly, but it trains the brain that finishing = dopamine hit.

Over time, this makes completion **addictive rather than aversive**. The brain starts chasing the finish line because the finish line feels good. Without this, the brain assumes finishing = boredom/shame/crash, and will sabotage completion to avoid that feeling.

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PART THREE

Real-World Applications

Applying Friction-Free principles to work, home, and relationships. These domain-specific strategies adapt the core toolkit to high-stakes contexts.

CHAPTER 7

Work & Career Systems

Thriving in neurotypical professional environments

Modern workplaces are built for neurotypical brains. Open offices, endless meetings, "urgent" emails, and implicit expectations about responsiveness create a minefield of friction points for ADHD professionals. You don't need to disclose your diagnosis to navigate this—you need systems that work regardless.

The ADHD professional advantage: Pattern recognition, crisis management, creative problem-solving, and hyperfocus capacity. The challenge: Sustained administrative compliance, meeting etiquette, and linear project management. This chapter covers how to maximize the advantage while automating the compliance.



Friction Point: The "Executive Function Tax"

Neurotypical coworkers spend 10% of their energy on organization. ADHDers spend 60%. That leaves less for actual value creation. The goal is to reduce the tax to 20% through externalization and automation.

CHAPTER 7 (CONTINUED)

Deep Work Blocks & Interruption Fortresses

Context switching destroys ADHD productivity. A 30-second interruption costs 23 minutes of recovery time for deep focus. In open offices, you're essentially working with a permanent 40% handicap.

The Fortress: Create "unavailable" time blocks (2-4 hours) where you are physically unreachable. Use noise-canceling headphones (even without audio), a "Do Not Disturb" sign, and auto-responders. If possible, work from home or a coffee shop during these blocks.

Communication Budgeting: Check email only at 11am and 4pm. Set an auto-responder: "I check email twice daily for better focus. For urgencies, call/text." Most "urgent" emails aren't. The ones that are will find you.

Template: The Auto-Response

"I'm currently in a deep work block to deliver better results. I check email at 11am and 4pm. If this requires immediate attention, please call me. Otherwise, I'll respond during my next batch." This trains colleagues and reduces anxiety.

CHAPTER 7 (CONTINUED)

Meeting Survival & Contribution

Meetings are ADHD kryptonite: Passive listening, no fidgeting allowed, tangential discussions, and no clear endpoint. But you can hack them.

The Role Hack: Volunteer to be note-taker or timekeeper. Having an active role creates dopamine through responsibility and permits fidgeting (typing/clicking). It also explains why you're not making eye contact—you're working.

Pre-Meeting Prep: Ask for agenda 24 hours ahead. If there isn't one, the meeting probably shouldn't exist. Prepare one talking point you want to make—having a "thing to say" keeps you listening for your cue rather than drifting.

MEETING CHECKLIST

Before accepting: Is there an agenda? Do I need to be there? Can I contribute in 5 minutes and leave?

During: Take standing notes (keeps you awake), doodle in margins (hidden fidgeting), set a timer (visible countdown reduces time anxiety).

CHAPTER 7 (CONTINUED)

Email as External Brain

Your inbox is not a to-do list. It's a chaotic stream of other people's priorities. ADHD brains see 50 emails and freeze, or hyperfocus on one complex email for 2 hours while ignoring the rest.

The 2-Minute Rule (Email Edition): If it takes under 2 minutes, reply immediately and archive. If it takes longer, move it to a "Needs Work" folder or task manager. Never leave it in the inbox—that's leaving a window open in your brain.

Template Libraries: Save canned responses for common requests. "Thanks for reaching out. I'm available [dates]. Here's my calendar link: [link]." Reduces the "blank page" initiation friction of starting an email from scratch.



Friction Point: The Email Debt Spiral

Ignoring emails creates anxiety about the ignored emails, which makes opening email more anxious, which makes you ignore it longer. Break the spiral with a "bankruptcy"—archive everything over a week old with a blanket "catching up" response.

CHAPTER 7 (CONTINUED)

Career Navigation & Disclosure

Should you tell your employer? There's no universal answer. If your performance is solid and accommodations are minor (noise-canceling headphones, flexible hours), you may not need to. If you're struggling, disclosure with specific requests often helps.

The Accommodation Menu: Remote work days, written summaries after verbal meetings, noise-canceling headphones, permission to stand/walk during calls, deadline reminders, project management software use. Frame these as "productivity optimizations" rather than medical needs if preferred.

ADHD Career Fit: Roles with variety, crisis management, creativity, and clear metrics tend to work better than roles with routine, isolation, or ambiguous success criteria. Emergency medicine, sales, entrepreneurship, consulting, and creative fields often fit better than accounting, data entry, or isolated research.

Strengths-Based Positioning

Don't lead with "I have ADHD." Lead with "I excel at pattern recognition and crisis management. I work best with clear deadlines and autonomy. Here's how I deliver results..." Frame your wiring as specialization, not limitation.

CHAPTER 8

Home & Daily Life

Keeping the domestic machinery running

Home maintenance is the ultimate ADHD challenge: Nobody's watching, there's no deadline, it's boring, and it's never-ending. Chores are pure friction—necessary but unrewarding.

The "Domestic Machinery" approach treats home systems like engineering problems. The goal isn't perfection; it's "functional enough with minimum energy expenditure." Good enough is done.



Friction Point: The "Clutter Blindness"

ADHD brains normalize clutter quickly. After 3 days, the pile on the chair becomes "just part of the room." This isn't laziness—it's sensory adaptation. You need external eyes or rotation systems.

CHAPTER 8 (CONTINUED)

The One-Touch & Containment Rules

The One-Touch Rule: If you touch it, you finish with it. Pick up a dish? It goes in dishwasher, not sink. Pick up mail? It gets sorted immediately, not placed on table. This prevents the "clutter waystations" that accumulate everywhere.

Containment Strategy: ADHD needs physical boundaries because mental boundaries fail. Every category gets a visible container: "Library books" basket by door, "returns" bin by door, "misc cables" box labeled. When the container is full, you must deal with it.

The "Clutter Inferno": One small pile attracts other items ("I'll just put this here for now"). Within a week, it's a mountain. Stop the first item. Never let the first item land without a home.

THE CONTAINER METHOD

Don't organize by "where it fits." Organize by "where I actually use it." Coffee supplies near the coffee maker. Shoes by the door they exit. The goal is zero walking distance for common actions.

CHAPTER 8 (CONTINUED)

Meal Systems: The Infinite Planning Problem

Meals require three decisions daily: What to eat, do I have ingredients, when to cook. That's 21 friction points per week just to eat. Decision fatigue kills meal compliance for ADHD.

The Fixed Menu: Same breakfast daily (zero decisions). Same 5-7 dinners rotated weekly (no planning). Grocery list is fixed—same items every week. This seems boring, but boredom is better than the chaos of "what's for dinner" at 6pm when you're already starving.

ADHD Cooking: One-pot meals, sheet pan dinners, slow cookers. Minimize steps and monitoring. Prep ingredients when you have energy (Sunday), not when you're hungry (Tuesday 6pm). If you wait until hungry to decide, you'll order delivery.

The Emergency Protocol

Keep "can't decide" emergency meals: Frozen burritos, pasta with jar sauce, eggs and toast. No shame in fallback meals. The goal is calories, not cuisine. Perfect is the enemy of fed.

CHAPTER 8 (CONTINUED)

Sleep Hygiene & The Evening Transition

Sleep is the foundation of executive function. ADHD brains often have delayed sleep phase syndrome—naturally wired for midnight-8am rather than 10pm-6am. Fighting this wastes willpower. Accommodate it where possible, or use strict protocols to shift it.

The Wind-Down Ritual: Start 90 minutes before target sleep. Dim lights (blue light blocks melatonin), cool room (65°F ideal), specific sequence (shower, tea, book, bed). The transition object (specific pillow, specific blanket) signals sleep mode.

Phone Exile: Phone charges in bathroom or kitchen, not bedroom. Use analog alarm clock. If you need phone for white noise, use an old phone with no apps or a dedicated device. The phone is the enemy of sleep.



Friction Point: The "Revenge Bedtime Procrastination"

ADHDers often stay up late because the evening is the only time they feel in control. Sleep feels like losing autonomy. Solution: Schedule "me time" earlier in the day so bedtime doesn't feel like theft.

CHAPTER 8 (CONTINUED)

Money & Bills: Automation First

Financial ADHD is expensive: Late fees, forgotten subscriptions, impulse purchases, tax penalties. The solution is removing human memory from the equation entirely.

The Automation Mandate: All bills on autopay. All savings automatic transfer on payday. Use one credit card for everything (simplifies tracking). Set calendar alerts 3 days before any manual action required (taxes, registration renewals).

The 72-Hour Purchase Rule: For non-essential purchases over \$50, write it down and wait 72 hours. If you still want it (and remember it), buy it. Most impulse buys are dopamine-seeking in the moment; they fade quickly.

Financial Body Doubling

Do bills with a friend over Zoom. "Bill pay date" with a buddy. You handle your paperwork while they handle theirs. The social accountability prevents avoidance, and you can celebrate together when done.

CHAPTER 9

Relationships & Communication

Navigating social friction without burning bridges

ADHD affects relationships through: Time blindness (chronic lateness), interrupting (impulse control), forgetfulness (missing birthdays), emotional intensity (RSD), and inconsistency (hyperfocus phases ignoring partners).

These aren't character flaws—they're neurological wiring. But the impact on loved ones is real. The solution isn't "try harder to be normal"—it's designing relationship systems that account for the wiring.



Friction Point: The "You Don't Care" Misinterpretation

Forgetting an anniversary isn't about love—it's about working memory. But neurotypical partners interpret it as disrespect. Proactive systems (calendar alerts, visible reminders) prevent the hurt, not just the forget.

CHAPTER 9 (CONTINUED)

Time Blindness & Social Commitments

ADHD brains don't feel time passing. "I'll be ready in 5 minutes" means "I have no idea how long this takes." The result: chronic lateness that reads as disrespect.

External Timekeeping: Multiple analog clocks in every room. Countdown timers for transitions ("leave for dinner" alarm 30 mins before, "start getting dressed" 15 mins before). Never rely on internal time sense—it doesn't exist.

The Pre-Transition: Start getting ready 2x earlier than you think necessary. Boredom of waiting is better than shame of lateness. Bring a book or fidget toy for the waiting time. If you're early, that's recovery time, not wasted time.

THE LATENCY BUFFER

Tell friends you're meeting 15 minutes before the actual time. Build in the buffer so when you run late (and you will), you're actually on time. No shame in engineering your social life for success.

CHAPTER 9 (CONTINUED)

Listening & The Interruption Impulse

ADHD listening is often "waiting to speak." The thought arrives and demands immediate expression, or it will vanish. This reads as selfishness, but it's actually fear of losing the thought.

The Parking Lot (Social Edition): Keep a small notebook or use a notes app. When the interrupting thought arrives, write it down instead of saying it. Tell your partner: "I'm writing this down so I don't forget—please continue." This validates the thought without derailing theirs.

Active Listening Hacks: Repeat back what you heard ("So you're saying...") before adding your response. This proves listening occurred and slows the impulse to jump in. Fidget with something discreet (ring, pen) to burn off the "speak now" energy.

Interrupting Repair

If you catch yourself interrupting: "Sorry, I got excited. You were saying..." and return the floor immediately. Don't defend it. The apology and return are the repair. Over time, this builds trust that you know the pattern and care about fixing it.

CHAPTER 9 (CONTINUED)

Rejection Sensitivity & Emotional Flooding

Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD) causes intense pain from perceived criticism, often leading to either people-pleasing (over-accommodation) or avoidance (ghosting). Both damage relationships.

The 24-Hour Rule: When you feel criticized, don't respond for 24 hours. Write the angry/sad response in a private note (venting), but don't send. RSD peaks fast and fades. After 24 hours, you'll often realize: a) they weren't attacking you, or b) it's not worth the conflict.

Pre-Emptive Disclosure: Tell close friends/partners: "Sometimes I misread tone and feel hurt when you didn't mean to hurt me. If I ask 'are you mad at me?' it's my brain being weird, not you." This frames it as your wiring, creating space for gentle correction.



Friction Point: The Apology Spiral

ADHDers often over-apologize for symptoms ("Sorry I'm late, sorry I forgot, sorry I interrupted"). This reinforces shame. Instead: "Thanks for your patience" (gratitude) rather than "Sorry I'm terrible" (shame). Same repair, different energy.

CHAPTER 9 (CONTINUED)

Partnerships & Shared Systems

Romantic partnerships require dividing labor by skill, not equality. If one partner has ADHD, the non-ADHD partner shouldn't manage "life administration" alone (resentment), but also shouldn't expect the ADHD partner to suddenly develop executive function (impossible).

The Roles Conversation: Explicitly divide: "I handle creative/emergency tasks; you handle scheduling/bills." Play to strengths. The ADHD partner might handle crisis childcare, spontaneous fun, or creative projects. The neurotypical partner might handle taxes, calendars, and meal planning. Neither is better—both are necessary.

Weekly Sync Meetings: 30 minutes every Sunday. Review calendar together. Who needs what this week? Who's handling which errands? This prevents the "I assumed you were doing it" disasters.

The Body Double Partner

Sometimes an ADHD partner just needs presence to do hard tasks (taxes, phone calls). Sit in the room while they make the call. Don't help—just witness. The social pressure reduces avoidance. Offer this; don't force it.

CHAPTER 9 (CONTINUED)

Friendship & Social Battery Management

ADHD socializing is often "feast or famine": Hyperfocus on a new friend for 2 weeks, then disappear for months. This confuses friends and creates guilt. Consistency beats intensity.

The Maintenance Text: Low-energy contact ("Thinking of you," "Saw this and thought of you") keeps the friendship warm between deep hangs. Don't wait until you have energy for a 3-hour coffee. Send the quick text now.

The Honest Bail: If you need to cancel, don't ghost. "I'm socially depleted today and wouldn't be good company. Can we reschedule? I value you and don't want to half-ass our time." Most people respect honesty over a fake migraine.

CHAPTER 9 (CONTINUED)

Digital Communication & the ADHD Inbox

Texting and messaging platforms are both a lifeline and a trap for ADHD adults.

The low barrier to contact is helpful — no phone anxiety, no live conversation. But the asynchronous nature creates problems: reading a message and intending to reply later, then forgetting entirely. The "seen" notification with no follow-up reads as rudeness to neurotypical senders.

The Unread as To-Do: Use "unread" status as a task flag. When you read a message you can't immediately respond to, mark it unread. Never let "read" mean "handled." This is a manual system — use it deliberately. The message staying unread is intentional friction to prevent forgetting.

The Draft Reply: When you think of a response but can't send it yet (bad timing, need to check something first), type the draft and save it. Don't close the thread. The open draft creates visual friction — you'll see it every time you open the app. It also preserves the thought, which would otherwise evaporate.

The "I Haven't Forgotten You" Text

If you know a response will be delayed, send a bridge: "Saw this — need to check my schedule. Will reply by Thursday." This doesn't require effort but prevents the sender from feeling ghosted and reduces your guilt load (which would otherwise compound into full avoidance).

Social Media & the Dopamine Spiral: Social media platforms are engineered to exploit the exact neurochemistry that makes ADHD difficult. Variable reward schedules (you never know if the next scroll will give you something good) create the same loop as slot machines. ADHD brains are disproportionately vulnerable.

The solution is not willpower — it is architecture. App timers with locked overrides, grayscale phone display (less visually stimulating), phone in another room

during work blocks, and dedicated "scroll windows" (15 minutes at lunch, 15 minutes at 9pm) with hard cutoffs. Make the slot machine inconvenient to reach.



Friction Point: The Notification Flood

Every notification is a forced context switch. For ADHD brains, recovering from that switch costs 5–20 minutes of productive time. Turn off all non-emergency notifications. Check communication on your schedule, not everyone else's.

Protecting Relationships from ADHD Digital Patterns: Let close people know that slow responses are not rejection — they're working memory. If someone matters to you and you've noticed you consistently go dark for weeks, schedule a "maintenance check-in" alert. Not because you've forgotten them — because your calendar is more reliable than your memory.

CONCLUSION

Building Your Friction-Free Life

You are not a broken neurotypical person. You are a fully functional ADHD person trying to run neurotypical software. This book gave you the operating system update: Friction-Free design that matches your cognitive architecture.

Start small. Pick one friction point—one task you avoid—and apply one tool. Body double for that taxes phone call. Put the shoes by the door. Set one calendar alert. Small wins create dopamine; dopamine creates motivation; motivation creates capacity for bigger changes.

Expect imperfection. Systems will fail. You'll ignore the alarm, lose the notebook, or skip the ritual. That's not failure—that's data. Adjust the system: Was the friction still too high? Was the dopamine too low? Iterate like an engineer, not a moralist.

THE FRIDGE LIST

Post this on your fridge:

1. If it takes 2 minutes, do it now.
 2. If it takes longer, write it down.
 3. Body double the hard things.
 4. Done is better than perfect.
 5. I am not lazy; I am differently wired.
-
-

FINAL THOUGHT

The world needs ADHD minds: The crisis managers, the pattern seers, the creative leap-takers, the hyperfocus experts.

The goal isn't to cure your ADHD—it's to clear the path so
your gifts can move.

May your friction be low and your dopamine be steady.

APPENDIX

Quick Reference: The Friction-Free Toolkit

Every core tool in the book, condensed. Bookmark this page.

THE 5-MINUTE RULE

THE PARKING LOT

You only have to do five minutes. Set a timer. Permission to stop after. Most times you won't — but you will start.

Sticky note next to you. Every intrusive thought goes on the lot, not into action. Review after your work block ends.

BODY DOUBLING

Work with another person present — physically or via FaceTime/Focusmate. Cameras on, mics off. Social presence activates your brain's self-monitoring.

TEMPTATION BUNDLING

Only listen to your favorite podcast while doing the hated task. The task becomes the key to the reward.

THE ONE-TOUCH RULE

If you pick it up, you finish with it. Dish to dishwasher. Mail to sorted. No intermediate landing zones.

DOPAMINE AUDIT

For any avoided task, ask: Which ICNU factor is missing? Interest, Challenge, Novelty, or Urgency? Add one.

THE DONE LIST

Write everything you actually did, not just what you planned to. Counters the "I did nothing" shame spiral with real evidence.

THE SHUTDOWN RITUAL

Review done list → pick tomorrow's one anchor task → clear workspace → say closing phrase → physical transition. Work is closed.

THE LAYER CAKE METHOD

Rotate three task types in 20–30 min blocks: creative, administrative, physical. Exploits novelty-seeking instead of fighting it.

THE 80% RULE

If it's 80% good, it's done. The last 20% costs 80% of the time. Define "done" before you start. Ship it.

THE 72-HOUR PURCHASE RULE

Non-essential item over \$50? Write it down, wait 72 hours. If you still want it, buy it. Most impulse buys evaporate.

THE 24-HOUR RULE (RSD)

When you feel criticized, don't respond for 24 hours. Write the reaction privately, don't send it. RSD peaks fast and fades.

INITIATION RITUAL

Consistent sensory-rich sequence that signals "work starts now." Specific tea, specific music, specific item. Same every time.

THE UNREAD-AS-TO-DO METHOD

Can't reply now? Mark message unread. Never let "read" mean "handled." The unread flag is your external memory.

THE FIXED MENU

Same breakfast daily. Same 5–7 dinners rotated weekly. Same grocery list. Remove all meal decision fatigue.

AUTOMATION FIRST (MONEY)

All bills autopay. Savings auto-transfer on payday. One credit card for everything. Remove human memory from financial compliance entirely.

YOUR FIRST MOVE

Pick one tool from this appendix. Write it on a sticky note. Put it somewhere you'll see it tomorrow morning. That's your assignment. Just one.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ryan Kelley

Ryan Kelley was diagnosed with ADHD as an adult — well past the years when a diagnosis might have explained the failed routines, the abandoned projects, and the persistent feeling of running at full speed while standing still.

That late diagnosis became the catalyst for building systems rather than relying on willpower. The strategies in this book are not sourced from academic offices or theoretical frameworks. They come from lived experience: the field, the job site, the 5am alarm that did not get answered, the grocery list that never left the house, and the slow, stubborn process of figuring out what actually works when your brain is wired the way it is.

Professionally, Ryan Kelley works in Instrumentation & Controls, a discipline that demands precision, pattern recognition, and calm under pressure — traits that coexist surprisingly well with ADHD when the right accommodations are in place.

He also runs ultramarathons, which turns out to be an excellent sport for brains that hyperfocus and don't hear the internal voice saying "you should probably stop."

This book is the guide he wishes had existed at diagnosis. It is written for adults who are tired of being told to "just make a list" by people whose lists actually work.

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Fill in your name and field in the bracketed placeholders before publishing.



Read in any order. Return to what you need. This book will wait.