

by Eric Tivers, LCSW, MSSW

# STRATEGY-



# BASED LIVING

## How I Get My ADHD ReWired

**W**HEN I WAS EIGHTEEN YEARS OLD, I almost flunked out of college. My second semester, which happened to be the only semester during my freshman year that I actually studied for, ended with a 1.8 GPA. That is what led me to my ADHD diagnosis.

Looking back, I would count this particular incident one of the greatest “failures” life has ever given me. The reason I feel this way is because this was truly the beginning of when I started to view failure as feedback. And while failure can be painful and inconvenient, it is a powerful teacher; that is, if you approach it with curiosity, without judgment, and an eagerness to learn.

Medication helped me profoundly back then and continues to be an important part of my ADHD treatment plan. However, I credit all of my successes since my diagnosis in 2001 to the strategies I have developed and designing what I refer to as a strategy-based life.

Strategy-based living has become an integral part of my day to day life. It’s become the lens through which I view my ADHD challenges and this has resulted in a number of creative solutions I have used to improve my life.

So I had this idea that I wanted to share with the ADHD community, a big list of all the strategies that I use on a daily basis to manage my ADHD. I started off by spending a few weeks tracking all of these strategies and created a five-part video series, which inspired this article.

But among all the things I have learned about how to better manage my time, my tasks, and the many details of life, the most important, life-changing, perspective-shifting concept that has helped me be more productive is something I learned from Brené Brown. And it is this: “We have to let go of productivity as measure of our self-worth.” Because you are already enough, and you are worthy of love and belonging now, not after you finish your task list.


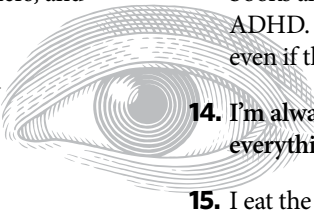
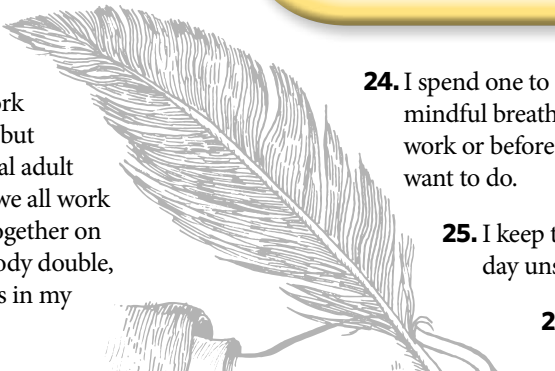
These strategies and insights that I am sharing, I’ve built over time. But I’m not done.

I’ve built these strategies to find solutions to my struggles. I have failed. I have been fired.

But even when the lessons were hard—and there have been some hard lessons—I have never stopped learning. And I love sharing the lessons I have learned.

Because when you have a strong sense of self-determination coupled with a deep sense of self-awareness and the courage to take chances, to ask for help, and to speak up for what you need, you CAN live a happier, less overwhelmed, more productive and fulfilled life. In this article I will share only thirty-five of the more than a hundred strategies I currently use—just a small sample!

# THIRTY-FIVE STRATEGIES

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1. I have backups of my most frequently used items, including phone chargers, timers, and watches.
  2. I use mind mapping to visualize and externalize planning.
  3. I turn email notifications off.
  4. I've ended my search for the perfect app. It doesn't exist.
  5. I have a dedicated email address for junk mail.
  6. I always wear a watch. My watches have timers and alarms.
  7. I place timers in arm's reach and clocks in my line of sight.
  8. When I have to stop in the middle of a project, I always leave myself a trail of crumbs. I spend a minute writing out what I just did, and what I'm going to do next.
  9. I only check my email once or twice a day. After all, email is a list of other people's priorities.
  10. I take at least ten to fifteen minutes to plan my week. And at least five minutes to plan my day. I also keep that plan in sight and review it at least five times a day.
  11. I leverage the power of supportive accountability. I tell someone about a task I've been putting off.
  12. When my paper piles are getting out of control or I have "ImBortant" work to do (work that's boring but important), I host a virtual adult study hall. This is where we all work on our important stuff, together on video. It's like using a body double, but as a group. We do this in my online coaching and accountability program.
  13. I learn productivity hacks from productivity books and podcasts outside of the world of ADHD. We really can learn a lot from them, even if they don't understand our struggles.
  14. I'm always on the lookout for ways to make everything easier and more efficient.
  15. I eat the same two to three high-protein things for breakfast every day.
  16. I generally wear the same color scheme.
  17. I give myself a deadline to make a decision, knowing that certainty does not exist.
  18. I outsource willpower whenever possible.
  19. I use a lamp timer to shut off my video games.
  20. I use internet blocking software.
  21. I work on improving my sleep hygiene, because the key to productivity is not time management, it's energy management.
  22. I use an app called Sleep Cycle. Its intelligent alarm function wakes me up during the lightest phase of sleep within twenty minutes of when I need to wake up.
  23. I use a backup alarm clock. Recent lesson learned: The Sleep Cycle app has occasionally not gone off. Yes, it ninety-seven percent reliable. That means you could oversleep up to nine days a year. That could get you fired or cause you to miss a flight so make sure you have a plan B.
  24. I spend one to two minutes practicing mindful breathing before doing deep work or before starting a task I don't want to do.
  25. I keep thirty percent of my work day unscheduled.
  26. I keep a fifteen-minute buffer between clients.



# THAT HAVE HELPED ME

**27.** Whenever possible, I schedule planning and collaboration meetings in the early part of the day. The later it gets, the more rabbit holes I find.

**28.** I never say yes before looking at my calendar.

**29.** I always make a list before walking into a store, even if I'm only going for one thing.

**30.** If I have to go to a store for one thing, I try to get someone on the phone whose main goal, is to help me get in and out.

**31.** I take self-care seriously.

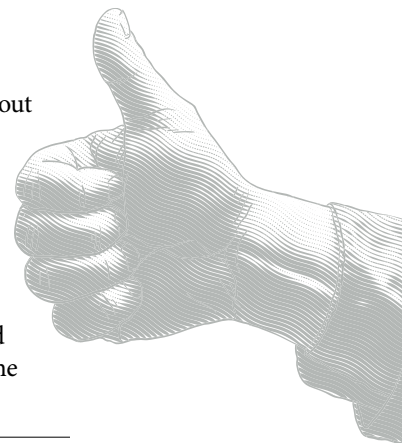
**32.** It's not just about what I do, it's about how I think about what I do.

**33.** I surround myself with supportive, encouraging people.

**34.** I know I am a work in progress.

**35.** I view life as a series of experiments, and failures are just feedback that will help me design better experiments. **A**

*Eric Tivers, LCSW, MSSW, is a psychotherapist, ADHD coach, and host of the ADHD reWired podcasts. Learn more and download his podcasts at [www.ADHDreWired.com](http://www.ADHDreWired.com).*



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Current areas served include North (metro NY – metro Philadelphia), Mid-Atlantic (Baltimore to northern VA), metro Miami, metro Houston and Colorado. Weekender is like a youth group happening filled with fun, a variety of recreational activities, and friends. Weekenders take place from Friday night through after lunch on Sunday. All events are professionally staffed – including a nurse – and carefully tuned to the participants. Transportation is included.

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