

THE BODY DOUBLE © 1996

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As a professional, business and personal coach, I specialize in working with highly skilled and creative, if sometimes overwhelmed, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) adults. Among a variety of coaching skills, I use many organizational tools and techniques to help my clients reach their goals. Over the years I've gathered some unusual tools and techniques for both the external task of organizing space and the internal task of clearing away the unnecessary, prioritizing what remains, setting next action steps and staying the course.

Some of these tools I have learned from my clients themselves. I'd like to share with you such a tool, in this case, a strategy for transitioning into and completing an otherwise boggling task. It was a client, whom I will call David, who first brought this tool to my attention. I have since come to refer to it as *the body double*.

When I first met David, he was a retired vice president of a major corporation. In his retirement, he was running three businesses out of his home-based office, two of them overseas. In observing David in his work space, I actually found him to be quite organized. He wasn't sitting eyeball high in papers. In fact, he hardly had any papers around him at all, and he had many working systems in place, but he felt terribly disorganized and distracted.

Much to his surprise, David had been recently diagnosed with AD/HD, which explained to him and to his wife, a lifelong difficulty in accomplishing certain mundane tasks that others seemed to handle with ease. As a v.p. in the corporate world, he had always had an executive assistant to connect the dots and pull loose ends together. Now, he had the time to do these tasks, and he had will to do them, but he couldn't keep on track. David's wife also ran a business out of their home and had her own well organized office. She offered to advise him, but they both agreed that this just didn't work. That's when they asked for help.

Together, David and I made modifications to his storage systems to better access for frequently needed items. We honed time management and prioritization systems to work better for him in his style of business. This, however, did not address the problem of his inattention and distraction. He explained that there were days when he easily got off track or would find it hard transitioning from one task into another. Frustrated, puzzled and somewhat embarrassed, he confessed, "You know, it seems that, sometimes, if I just have someone sitting in a chair nearby, even my wife, I can accomplish more than if I'm alone." *Simply having another human being sitting nearby, enabled David to stay on track.*

David had identified something which I had noticed before, when I had worked primarily as an organizational coach, in working with and listening to my other clients. There were times when just being in proximity, not advising, sorting, or strategizing, brought clarity and focus to the client. I felt it. I knew the client felt it, too. This phenomenon of *just being there*, that David first described, I now refer to as the body double principle.

But why does a body double work? There are at least a few possible explanations. The simplest explanation is that the body double serves as a physical and emotional anchor for the distracted individual who feels more centered by the presence of another person in their space. The distracted person may feel both responsible to and for the body double spending time with him. This perception translates as, "I can't waste this gift of time."

The body double may also serve to provide not only a physical boundary, as a sort of living fence, but is also a physical stop watch or clock by which the frequently time-challenged AD/HD brain can now measure itself - "I need to begin this now and work toward completion, while I have my body double here."

Yet another explanation might be that the body double serves as a kind of improved mirror - a calm reflection for the individual with AD/HD of how his over-stimulated mind and body would like to be at the moment. The body double thus becomes a model of control, and a mirror confidently reflecting back the message, "I can concentrate. I am working. I am focused."

One last explanation - in eastern cultures energy is referred to as chi (or qi) and is viewed as being either in or out of balance in the human body, as well as, in the surrounding environment. Acupuncturists stimulate or move chi to put the body back in balance. There are many forms of exercise and meditation, such as tai chi and chi gung among them, which are about the management and flow of energy. Feng shui, (fung shway), is the 5000 year old art of balancing positive and negative chi in the space around us, with the goal in mind of optimizing energy in the living and working

space.

So, what exactly does chi have to do with a body double? The body double might be a kind of chi balancer or barrier helping to contain the flux of energy and thought in an AD/HD brain at risk of spilling out into the chaotic universe. The body double might also stand as a buffer against distracting energy from the outside, ready to bombard the overly-sensitive individual.

Whether you prefer the practical, psychological, or metaphysical explanation for the effectiveness of the body double, consider it a gift from David and all of the others, who have experienced what they, too, discovered, but could not explain. If a task at hand requires your attention and seems impossible to complete consider the possibility of begging, borrowing or paying for a body double to sit in the chair next to you.

Who and what should you look for in a body double? Find someone who can be fairly quiet and independent . He or she can sit, read or write letters. They might even do some small task without interrupting you. It requires energy to instruct, supervise or be interrupted by another person, and that expenditure of energy equates to distraction.

This is not to say that there is a definite time and need to hire outside help - a coach, professional organizer or office assistant. There is such a time. I encouraged David to hire a student, housewife or fellow church member to sit and keep him company. His wife may not be the best person for the job but, he could use her in a pinch. In the months to follow David hired various short term office support help, who served sometimes as body double, other times as office assistants. Knowing when to hire

someone to help with office work or with just paying the bills, is also a useful skill.

The body double, at its simplest, is a chair holder, space taker-upper, karmic anchor or a wedge between you and the door. And it might be a useful tool in your own magic bag of tricks to use at just the right time for getting a job done and staying on track.

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