

From Vogue to ADHD Champion – my startup story

Natural ADHD qualities like curiosity, creativity, and courage can make brilliant entrepreneurs, which is maybe why we're 300% more likely to start our own businesses.

Temps de lecture : minute

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However, there's a big difference between starting and sustaining a business - and understanding our ADHD is crucial.

I became self-employed at 13, when my mum signed me up to a modelling agency. I didn't want to do it, but my first job ended up in *Vogue*, and I just carried on.

I'd see myself on billboards on the way to school and on the cover of magazines, but was extremely unhappy. It might sound like the dream, but I hated having no control over my body, work, or life. I had an agency, but no agency.

Even when I studied law at university, I still couldn't say 'no' to modelling, despite being pressured to lose 3 inches from my hips. Afterwards, I'd always quit jobs when my agency called - even after I'd left! I constantly found myself in exploitative situations, such as having debt racked up in my name, which I blamed myself for.

I couldn't trust myself, as I had no idea what I'd do by the end of the day. I self-medicated with alcohol and moving country, which spiralled into wanting to end my life.

It was only when I was diagnosed with ADHD aged 25 that I understood that this was not my fault. My neurodevelopmental challenges with impulsivity, memory and thinking ahead meant that I struggled to regulate my decisions, combined with an industry built on exploiting vulnerable people.

Receiving support for my ADHD changed everything. Firstly, I wrote *'the Model Manifesto'* discovering my ADHD-fuelled passion for social justice. This led me to a 'normal' job in immigration, mental health and disability law, staying for over 2 years.

When I decided to quit and set up ADHD Works, this was on my terms. Learning that my doctor's ADHD assessment waiting list was 7 years long led me to write *'ADHD: an A to Z'* to help others, knowing how that diagnosis saved my life.

Accessing tailored support from an ADHD coach helped me to publish this book. A few months later, Microsoft asked me to do an internal talk about ADHD, and I realised I could make a real difference by using my voice.

As I received daily messages from people seeking support, I decided to train as an ADHD Coach myself. Quitting my job was the scariest thing I've ever done, but my coach said, 'jump and the net shall appear' - and it did.

Setting up ADHD Works has been a rollercoaster, but one I had control over, because I understood and leveraged my ADHD to work *for* me, not against me.

To address the overwhelming demand, I learned how to make online courses, utilising my racing-car-speed brain to coach hundreds of people. My corporate experience led me to train companies like Disney, overcoming the fear by using my ADHD tendency to 'act before thinking'.

I leveraged my ADHD strengths of curiosity and creativity to run the first ever ADHD retreat. Using my hyper-focus, I presented to the World Health Organisation and led Parliamentary campaigns, prompting hundreds of people to write to their MP about assessment waiting times.

ADHD makes us brilliant 'blue sky thinkers'. So, to tackle the lack of support for ADHD-ers, I decided to train and certify my own ADHD coaches.

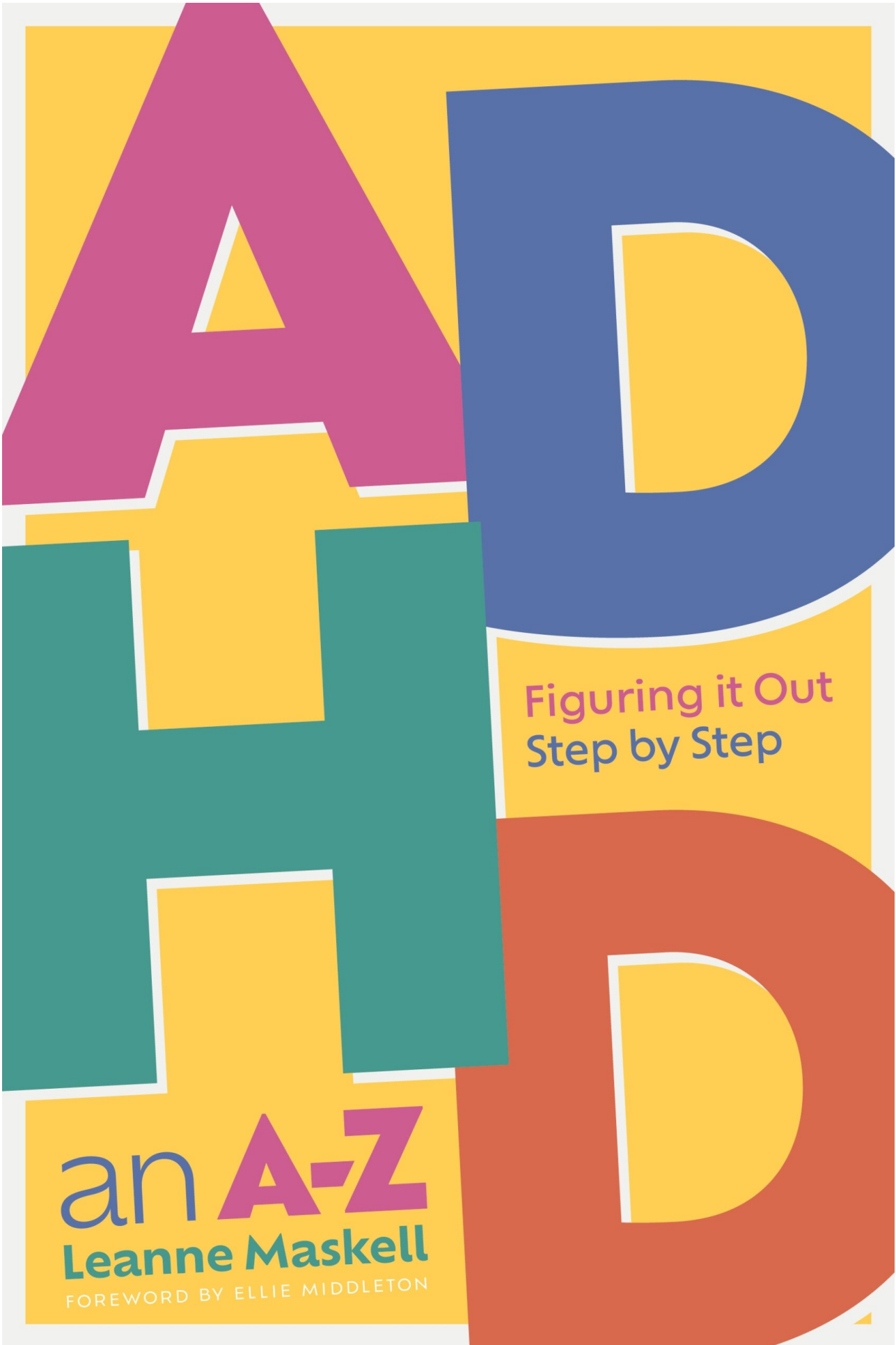
My business is powered by my ADHD: I just find ways to do the things I want to do and tackle the status quo. Understanding and finding support for my ADHD challenges enabled me to focus on what I'm best at: innovating.

Here's how to make your ADHD work for you as an entrepreneur:

1. Set up your environment to allow you to hyper-focus on your strengths, but prioritise self-care to avoid burnout.
2. Establish support and systems for your ADHD challenges, like a virtual assistant.
3. Regularly set yourself short-term goals and focus on these before chasing new ideas. You can do anything, but not everything (at the same time!).
4. Try to do something first every day that will make you money, or that you're avoiding, like accounting. Dopamine doesn't pay the bills!
5. Embrace failure: every mistake is a lesson!
6. Tackle Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria by focusing on the people you're helping. It's not about you: it's about them - and the world needs what you have to offer.
7. Know that you don't have to do things like everybody else: you don't need permission. Just do them!
8. Get an ADHD coach. If you're in the UK, Access to Work can fund this.

Ultimately, ADHD can be an entrepreneur's greatest strength - or weakness. Understanding it empowers you to reach your full potential *because* of your ADHD, not in spite of it.

Leanne Maskell is an ADHD Coach, the founder and director of coach training company ADHD Works and author of ADHD: An A to Z.



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FOREWORD BY ELLIE MIDDLETON

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