

Let's Talk Learning Disabilities

EPISODE 04

Welcome to Let's talk learning disabilities with Laurie Peterson and Abbey Weinstein. Laurie and Abbey spend their days talking about dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, and ADHD. They talked to parents of struggling students and adults who have had a lifetime of academic challenges. They want to share those stories along with their own insights with you. So let's talk, learning disabilities.

Laurie: Welcome to Let's Talk Learning Disabilities. This is Laurie Peterson and today you are in for a treat! I had a chance to sit down and talk with Michael Snyder, he is an ADHD coach out of Austin, TX. We actually had so much to talk about that we decided to split our discussion into two parts. So, sit back and enjoy part 1 of this conversation that I had with ADHD coach, Michael Snyder.

Laurie: Hi, welcome to today's session. This is Laurie. I am without Abbey today. She is on a ski trip, but I have a great substitute fill in for her today. Today I am with Michael Snyder. He has an ADHD coach and he is out of Austin, Texas, but he is visiting us today and is going to share a little bit about what it means to be an ADHD coach and a little bit about himself. So thank you for being here today. I appreciate it. Michael, tell us a little about yourself.

Michael: Thank you so much for having me. I appreciate the opportunity. Yeah. Um, so where we'd like me to start.

Laurie: Well, when someone says, what is an ADHD coach, what do you tell them?

Michael: Um, what is an ADHD coach? Um, you know, I guess one of the questions I get a lot is ADHD coach versus therapy. Um, and once again, just what is an ADHD coach? Um, I guess what I explained to somebody is that, um, Yeah. And each coach and coaching is very future-focused. Um, we're not dealing with past traumas. Um, one of the things that we focus on with ADHD coaching is trying to build a better self-awareness around your ADHD while you're doing things like, you know, how can you change what you're doing with things?

Laurie: Like, why do I procrastinate?

Michael: Yes. That's a great one. Right. and of course, with ADHD, everyone comes to me like, Oh, I procrastinated doing this procrastinate, doing that. So really understanding like, why are you doing those things is a lack of interest. It is just something that, you know, you just don't really want to do, or maybe you just don't know where to start. So in coaching, you know, we discuss goals, clarify goals. A lot of people come to me and they're like, you know, I know I want to do some of these things, but I don't know how to get it there. Or, I just, you know, I'm lacking clarity on the goal is, and you know, what I should be looking to do, I just know I need to improve. And then of course, like there's a time management piece and, you know, organizational piece, which, you know, comes from prioritization and things, you know, like that.

Laurie: Yeah. Learn what to do first. Correct. Right. Like you gotta always start somewhere and it's knowing where to start.

Michael: Exactly. Exactly. And you know, people come in and it's like, all right, well, I want to do this project. I have this goal in mind and it's like, well, I don't know where to start. I don't know where it ends. What does this goal actually look like? Right. You know, it's just overwhelming. And you break it down into smaller pieces, as small as possible, right. Day-to-day, you know, little goals, you know, to do for it, to get to that ultimate goal.

Laurie: The silly analogy someone gave me one time, which is so appropriate is how do you need, how do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time, right? Like totally overwhelming. You just take it one bite at a time. Even just people I say that people are like, what? Yeah. So what made you interested? How did you end up here?

Michael: Oh man. Um, kind of long story. Yep. Um, so I was diagnosed probably when I was 10 years old, struggled in school, you know, impulsive, you know, got into fights a lot. I was always the one to blame.

Laurie: Did you struggle academically?

Michael: Struggled academically, yeah. Academically. You know, I guess, I don't know necessarily I struggled socially. I was definitely made fun of a lot. And then impulsively, I would be the one to lash out. And I didn't know at the time that this was necessarily because of my ADHD because I was a bad kid and you know, like did I want to do harm to people? Not the case. Um, so it was on and off medications from probably like 10 to 16, 17, 18. Started taking medication again when I was probably 19 or 20.

Laurie: Why did you stop?

Michael: You know, wasn't interested in school, you know, didn't really think the medication was helping. Didn't like the, what you've mentioned, the medications, making my body feel. And at that age from like 10 to 16, like you're going, you know, hormones and puberty and all these other things then to throw in something else. I mean, it's, you know, especially back then, you know, I'm 39 now. So like, you know, call it like late eighties, early nineties, there were only a couple of medications that they were using. Right. So like, it's like, okay, was this or nothing, you know? Right. Yeah. Eventually, yes. I didn't take nothing. So started taking medication when I was 19 at 20. And it just like, made a world of difference, you know, for me personally at the time.

Laurie: So why do you think it made a difference at 20 and not at 16?

Micahel: Probably finding the right medication. Right medication, right dosage, things like that. So starting medication again. So I've been in school, left school, uh, was there for like a semester, worked at a trucking company for four and a half years, um, with one of my best friend's fathers. Um, and then I went into real estate for 10 years. Um, yeah, became a real estate broker. I'm originally from New York. So it was a real estate broker for 10 years. When I was 32, I decided, you know what, I want to change. I was tired of the cold weather, picked up my stuff and moved to Austin, Texas. Um, so being in Austin, I knew I wanted this. Um, I knew one's got a real estate. Didn't know what I wanted to do. Right. And it means I'm having ADHD. We're known to go from job to job, to job, to job. Right. And I happened to stay with a career for 10 years. That's impressive. Yeah. You were doing, it was always different project. Real estate lends itself to that. Always something new. Exactly. Exactly. And, you know, eventually it's like, okay, yes. Working with people is great. You know, the thrill of the kill right. Is great. Um, but you know, I got burned out doing it and, you know, once again, I was in New York and I was just like, yo, it's time for something else. Right. Um, so got to Austin. Um, in 2013, uh, did a little bit of real estate stuff. Did that for two years, went to work at a tech company for a year. I was at a company from 2016 to 2017. I left March of 2017. Had no job lined up, just knew I did not want to do that. Right. At the time, you know, I was about to turn 36 years old, had no idea what I want to do with the rest of my life. I started, you know, looking on, on LinkedIn and monster and you know, kind of like, I never even did a resume to be honest with you because I've been in real estate. I'm on all these job sites and I'm like, I'm like, Oh, these just seem kind of like, stupid, like going back to work for somebody. Like, I just, I was like, I want to do outside sales. I need a job. I'm not going to be, you know, like, behind a

desk all day long. I think it was preferred to work for myself. I prefer to work myself. Right. And that's what I started realizing at the time was, you know what, like stop focusing on like, What I want to do and start ticking off things that I don't want to do. Right. And that made a world of difference. Right. Right. Um, and then, uh, it was probably July a friend called me in for the outside sales interview.

It was a fantastic opportunity. Six-figure job. Um, you know, a company car, like all like the perks, benefits, health insurance, as, you know, being from real estate. Like I never had any of these things. Right. So it was very attractive to me. Um, and, um, I met with the CEO and he looks at me and we're about to finish the interview or our interview. And he goes, how do you define success for yourself in 10 years, professionally and personally, and I was a month away from turning 36 and I looked at him like a deer in headlights. I made up some whatever answer. Right. And, um, you know, the only thing in my mind, I didn't say this to him. I think it was like two o'clock on a Friday.

I knew at five 15, I was going to be training at my gym and my seventh areas and heavy drinks and dinner with my friends. If you asked me what I was doing the next day, probably the same thing. I get to work on it a little bit earlier and then, you know, dinner, my friends right then Saturday. And I kind of set out at that point, on this mission, like who do I want to be? What do I want to do with my life? And I literally, I just, I had no idea. And, and you know, I start, I was never a big reader. I started reading a whole lot then, um, I picked up this book, um, in September actually, My therapist who prescribes my medication, referred the book to me four and a half years ago. Of course I bought it right then. And it was sitting in my house. I'm impressed. So it was meant to be. And, um, the book was Attention Deficit Disorder in Adults, A Different Way of Thinking, by Lynne Weiss who I think actually might be based in Dallas. And 30 pages in, I'm in tears. It gave scenarios of five different people who are in different stages of their life. All had been recently diagnosed with ADHD and every single one of these people, I was like, this is me. This was me. This will be me again. And I had no idea that, um, that's how ADHD, you know, affected my life. Like to that day, I was now 36 years old. The only thing I understood about ADHD was that I was hyperactive. I couldn't pay attention and, um, took medication for it. Those are the three things that's as far as my knowledge went, you know, at 36 years old and being diagnosed when I was 10.

So right then I was like, I knew immediately, nobody should feel this way. Right? Like, like people need to be more self-aware of like, not just, you know, go and like take a pill. Right. And just go through life. I had no idea how I was going to, or what I was going to do with ADHD, but I knew I was like, you know what? I want to do

something with ADHD. Yeah. Um, so from there I had also like, you know, in this kind of self discovery period of my life. One of the things I want to do is go work at a volunteer orphanage once a month. Um, so in December I finally, it was just like, well, I don't know where to start. Finally. I just Googled it. And three weeks later, I'm like on a plane to Peru to volunteer at this orphanage for a month. Oh my gosh. So, um, When I volunteered with his orphanage for a month, I still had this idea of, of wanting to do something with ADHD. Once again, like I knew I wanted it to be like a remote option, you know, I want to be able to travel, you know, and kind of do what I want to where I can do like zoom, video conferences, whatever. And this is pre COVID right now. Everything's video conferences. Right. I came back from Peru and I had a business idea to like, kind of like a Tom shoes type deal. Then I wanted to do something like with orphanages. Um, and then I had a friend who did this and I spoke with her about it and she's like, we're actually going to Bali. You know, we have a business partner there. So I'm sitting there thinking about it. I'm like, Hmm. Digital nomad capital of the world. Like, you know, I want to have a remote business, right? Like, well, if I'm gonna do this, like I can go there and meet like like-minded people. So I bought a one-way ticket a week before I left. It was the end of February of 2018. I get to Indonesia, talked to a bunch of people, the idea's sort of fate a little bit. I would keep telling people, I'm like, Hey, you know, we're kind of forcing these beliefs and these jobs, which were never like things that we really, you know, like maybe our parents did or it kind of just like, Oh, well just made sense at the time. And I'd have these conversations with people and like, you know, have your thought about like, you dream job? Something passionate, something that involves your strengths. Right? People kept coming to me like, Hey man, you know, you inspired me. I want to change careers. I want to do this. I want to do that. Like, I've, I've had this cushy job where I'm making six figures and you know, it's all this money. Hey, I work 30 days on, I worked 30 days off. Right. And like, I get to fly first class, wherever I want in the world. Right. When I'm not working. And then I have to be back and this particular person worked in the oil and gas. Um, and I was like, you know, I was like, is ADHD coaching an actual thing? And sure enough, I look it up. And there's one school in New York, which, um, you know, you can get certified from, um, I waited till, um, Like, so I was 12 hours difference. So it hasn't questions that was asked school. So I wait until like 12 o'clock at night, don't mind time. And I bought all these minutes on my, um, like, you know, on my, my SIM card or whatever. I was going to use whatever. And I called the school. And also when I was researching the school, I listened to, they had an hour long, like teleclass. And the founder of the Academy says something. And I actually have the quote on my website. It says, "If you knew that you create a life, you truly desire and knew that you couldn't fail, what would it look like?" And right when I heard that was literally one of the last things he said, I was like, this is what I'm going to do with the

rest of my life. That's awesome. And sort of, so I call and a guy answers the phone. I recognize the voice.

Laurie: Shut up. Did you talk to the founder?

Michael: Yes. I. David. I apologize. You have to listen to this. I can never pronounce your last name, but yeah. Anyways, so, um, he answers the phone. I was like, you've always thought it was Dave. And he's like, yeah. And he's like, honestly, it's, I've never, haven't. Not yet to answer the phone 15 years here. And I saw this like exotic number coming in and he's like, well, what the hell? Let me just say, Oh, everything happens for a reason admin instance where a phone call, I get disconnected. My minutes were up. I had no idea how long this was going to be. And somehow he ends up calling back through like Skype and we talked for like an hour and a half. And we both like, we're very, very similar. Um, you know, he's a big basketball guy. I was a big basketball guy growing up anyway. So like we hit it off and he's like, yeah, And we just bonded right there. Like a day later, I signed up for the courses and started my training, like April of 2018. That is awesome.

Laurie: What a cool story. So little long-winded well, to see the evolution of how you started out thinking you wanted to do one thing, then not knowing what you want to do and how reading one book, changed your life. It was, yeah. And how it took you for your street, the book, but you weren't ready for it at that. When, when your therapist gave you that book, the first time you weren't ready. Yep. We're ready. You were ready in four years. Yeah. That's awesome. That's awesome. So now you are an official ADHD coach. I'm officially a ADHD coach. So why do we need ADHD coaches? What do you do? How do you help?

Michael: So, um, First off, you know, it's ADHD, coaching be very future focused. Right. You know, we work on these strategies to help people achieve their goals, right. Like I want, what is, you know, what is best for my client? And if they actually don't know what's best for them, like, that's something that we talk about. Right. And, you know, people go in and it's like, they, for instance, like, like a. A life coach, for instance, right. If someone comes through and you know, I'm a life coach by ADHD. Right. But what we do from the ADHD side is we're looking at all of these things that someone's going through through an ADHD lens.

Laurie: You understand how their brain works.

Michael: Exactly, exactly. Right. So it's not only like that. That life coaching side of it. But also when people come to me, they're coming with all of these other layers

where like, they probably have a bunch of lagging skills, whether it's someone who's 15 years old to like someone who's, you know, a 40 year old professor, you know, at a major college. They come in and it's like, well, you know what? I was always able to work harder. And then at some point there's that shift, right? So when that shift happens, no matter what age it is, you can no longer work harder, no matter how, like, no matter how hard you tried. Those skills are just not going to be enough, not enough.

Laurie: Your strategies run out.

Michael: Exactly. Exactly. So when they come to me, you know, they're at a loss, you know, they're feeling stuck. Um, you know, they might be at a point where it's just no matter what they do, and if they feel like they're doing it right.

Laurie: So how are you different from a therapist?

Michael: Future-focused right. And that's not to speak against, you know, you know, all therapists. Right. But it's yes. Like in, in, you know, before we started here, we had talked a little about like, Hey, you know, it's, we're not dealing with those, those traumatic events. Right, right. You know, from the past. Right. And once again, not taking, you know, Therapy is a must, right? Coaching and therapy combines.

Laurie: Yeah. Benefit from both together at the same time, you're, you're dealing with the, especially with ADHD, because you've got to deal with all of the, like we talked about earlier, the negative self-talk right. All that, all those times you've told yourself. God so stupid. I can't believe I didn't do that. Or other people are telling you you're smarter than this, or you're just lazy or all that. There's so much negativity. You gotta, you got to unravel some of that. Like, that's just not just going to go away because you take some medicine and you learn a new strategy. You still have to deal with that and kind of unravel that. But I think doing those two things side by side, while you sort of undo the bad stuff and create strategies for the new stuff. That to me is like, yeah. So how does medication play into somebody? If you have somebody that you're coaching, you know, everybody has a different take on medication. You're are you currently taking medication?

Michael: I am currently taking medication.

Laurie: As am I, um, so if you, do you find that if you have somebody that's not on medicine. It's harder to get them or do most of the people that come to you, are they already succumbed and said, yes, please give me medicine?

Michael: A little of both.

Laurie: Okay. Do you notice it harder for people to develop new strategies and, and be not and be successful because they can still be successful that it might take a lot longer because they're having trouble with still with a focus piece.

Michael: Yeah. No, this is a, this is a very sensitive topic in a trick question yet. So, you know, I'll, I'll answer this from my own personal experience and point of view. So from someone who, um, took medication straight for, you know, 18 years, and then when I was living in Indonesia, you know, like one of the things I thought about was, and I was struggling with myself was number one is like, okay, um, I couldn't get Vyvanse, you know, I couldn't get my medication in Indonesia. Right. So, you know, and I was able to get a three-month supply, like when I went and by the way, when I went, I thought it was gonna be there for three weeks. And I ended up being there for six months, total.

Laurie: So you ran out.

Michael: Well, so I know, so actually came back in between and got another months dose now. I came back. I had a wedding that I was in, which I knew I couldn't miss. Right. Um, and I just started questioning myself and I was like, you know, literally 18 years straight. Like, am I the same person on a medication as I am off the medication? Like, have I taught myself enough strategies, you know, in my life that like, you know, I just don't need the medication. Like, I didn't know if I was just a shell of myself, you know, off the medication. I just, I literally had no idea. And, I was like, you know what, let me, you know, I came off the medication when I was there and the first couple of days were rough. Rough. And so I take medication every day for 18 years. Right. And maybe I'd taken a day or two off here and there. Right, right.

Laurie: Did you experience withdrawal?

Michael: Yeah. So also, you know, tired, right. Super unfocused got to adjust. Right, right. Whatever you call it, whatever it is. Yeah. And you'll clearly, it's like, it's gonna be different for everybody. But I remember like trying to read something like my coaching stuff. I just started, um, going to school for my coaching. And I like, my eyes can focus on the screen. Um, and you know, every day, just, it kind of like, I literally had to the computer, I was like, I just got, put this on. I'm just

going to go to sleep. I'm going to lie down and watch a movie, whatever it is, distract myself with something else.

Um, and every day I got better and better, the first couple of days were not rough. Not like I was bedridden or anything like that. It was you know, brain fog. Yeah. Um, and then, you know, I'd still be kind of tired. Um, and then it was getting better and better. And then, you know, I had also explored, um, what was it, um, you know, different like dietary options to help, like for, you know, cognitive function. I was trying intermittent fasting with Keto. Eventually I did this for about six months and I didn't find a sustainable for me. Right. Um, you know, I couldn't, you know, like to sit down to read something and I couldn't, I couldn't shut my brain off. Like there was, you know, I'm sure you've heard, you know, it's like a million tabs open on your computer, going on your brain or like you have, you know, a hundred, you know, uh, you know, TV channels and you just can't tune to one channel. I was like, you know what? I was like, I proved to myself that I am the same person on it in terms of like my, my character of who I am and who I am, my personality, and like who I am. And like, in my soul, like the medication was not making me who I was and I was happy with that. Yeah. Yeah. So going back on was kind of like, you know what, and I went back on a much lower.

Laurie: Oh, interesting. So totally off topic, but I did try to stop my medicine just because I don't really know why I decided, kind of the same thing I think. And, um, it has been several years. But one of the side effects that I thought was fascinating is I had really crazy dreams and they were super, um, realistic or like clear vivid. And I would wake up and be like that. And I would remember it and it was so weird and I Googled it, you know? And that's actually a thing. Like when you go off your stimulants, Dream interesting dreams or weird dreams or vivid dreams for a short time is not uncommon. And I thought that was crazy interesting. And it only lasted a couple of days and, uh, you know, same with, I felt the same way. Like I was a little bit tired, a little bit mad, but I also came to the same conclusion that, yes, my personality is basically the same, but I'm much more efficient and effective. On my medicine, I can get more done. I am better focused. Um, so it is very interesting though. Yeah. Just a little sidebar there.

Michael: Yeah, no, no, of course. Yeah, I don't, I don't, I don't remember having, I don't remember having dreams or anything like that. Yeah.

Laurie: It was kind of cool though. Cause I don't usually remember my dreams. Uh, so, but when you're so back to the original question, because of course shockingly, we got sidetracked. Um, so when you've been coaching people that don't take medicine, do you find that you have a hard time keeping them focused? Like when you're trying to talk to them and teach them something or they, or are they so ready for help that they're like all in it doesn't really matter.

Michael: Once again, I don't know if I have a straight answer for you, but yeah. I think people come sometimes they're like, Hey, I want to try this. Like, I'm like, I never wanted to take medication. I want to try this first and see how this goes. And then eventually kind of like, go on medication. Like it it's.

Laurie: Yeah. Everyone's so different.

Michael: You know, some people like to have this like great self-awareness or they have a self-awareness, but they know there's something not right.

Laurie: But I also think too and answering my own question. I do actually think though, by the time people do come to you, they are so desperate and they want the help. Like they have to be self-aware just to make the phone call. Unless it's like, unless it's a high school student, which is a whole other story, but the adults at least are, so they already have that self awareness and they want the help and they are all in there. Like you are, you are going to be it. You're going to help me figure this stuff out.

Michael: So I do think you probably don't notice a big difference with them. Yeah. High school students, a little bit different. And once again, like my story of me taking myself off medication, or trying different medications. Right. There's also that, like that. That in-between, you know, like that, um, huge experimental period, right. With finding the right medication, finding the right dosage, like, you know, you're going through all this. Like, I've actually watched it with a client recently. Who's not a kid, but just even an adult 41 year old male. Um, and like, He just started taking medication as we started working together. So like he was on one medication and then, you know, two weeks and he's like, Oh, and the news on one thing that was for like anxiety and then started something for ADHD. And then like, you know, so I watched this like transition and finally, when it was like, he found the right thing, I saw like, like there was a shift. Like in his energy and his, you know, and not like, um, You know, when you're going through it, those experimentations, it's messing with you, right. In your brain it is absolutely. Yeah.

So, you know, you'll see different. Different things from a, you know, from a client like going through that.

Laurie: Wow, so much good stuff. Be sure to come back for the second half of my interview with Michael in our next episode. You're not going to want to miss it. Thank you so much for joining us, have a great day, and let's talk learning disabilities.

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